

# The ASEAN



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## TOWARDS A SAFER, STRONGER FUTURE FOR ALL

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ASEAN in 2021

**CONVERSATIONS**  
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# The ASEAN

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## A Note from the Editorial Team

Without exception, we all led disrupted lives in 2020. Many of our plans—big or small—were thrown out the window. The pandemic's impact may have caused a job loss, a forced retirement, a skipped year at school, a postponed wedding, or a canceled overseas holiday.

For the many who lost loved ones to COVID-19, the impact is more unendurable. Globally, over two million people have died from this dreadful disease. While the numbers in the ASEAN region are still relatively low, there is concern that more infectious virus variants will cause new waves of transmission. A glimmer of hope is on the horizon. Countries are now starting to roll out approved vaccines and inoculate their most vulnerable populations, less than a year after the virus reached all corners of the globe—an unprecedented and herculean feat.

The questions most of us ask now: What is the plan?

When can we get the vaccines and resume our interrupted lives? The answers are quite clear. Scientists and doctors caution that the vaccine is not a magic potion that will end the pandemic soon. The process of procuring and distributing safe and efficient vaccines is complex and challenging. So, for now, health protocols, preventive measures, and altered lifestyles will remain.

ASEAN's priority this year is to ensure people in the region receive urgent relief from the pandemic's devastating impact on lives and livelihood. As ASEAN's Chair for 2021, Brunei Darussalam announced the year's theme of "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper." Dato Paduka Seri Haji Aminuddin Ihsan bin Pehin Dato Seri Paduka Haji Abidin, Chair of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC)

Council and Brunei Darussalam Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, talks to *The ASEAN* about ASCC's priorities for this year.

These priorities and more are included in ASCC's plans for each sector. This issue details the sectoral plans for health, labour civil service, education, youth, sports, disaster and humanitarian assistance, culture, information, and the environment. Highlighted, too, are the accomplishments of the past year. While there were several postponed meetings, the ASCC's work on its programmes and initiatives has been relentless and productive. Several sectors are currently finalising work plans for the next five years; inevitably, lessons learned from this pandemic will need to be considered in the planning.

Even as the pandemic consumed our lives in 2020, the climate crisis looms large. The year 2020 is set to be one of the hottest years on record. It is a stark reminder that the earth is ailing too. Due to the pandemic, the United Nations Climate Change Conference or COP 26 meeting was postponed from November 2020 to November this year. This meeting is critical in driving discussions on what countries have done to fulfill their pledges to stop global warming and what more can be done for planetary health. Two of the articles in this issue also tackle ASEAN's initiatives to address climate change and its impacts.

How ASEAN nations respond to the current crises, which have wreaked havoc to the economy and people's lives, will set the course of development for years to come. As the pandemic and climate crisis rage on, it is incumbent on all of us to lay plans for the future that will safeguard our precarious existence on a planet that needs healing too. ■



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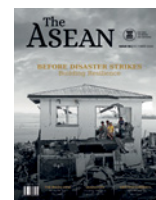
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# Inside View



**BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**  
2021

Brunei Darussalam  
leads ASEAN in 2021  
with the theme,  
"We Care,  
We Prepare,  
We Prosper."

As the world reels from  
the disastrous impact  
of the pandemic, the  
ASEAN Socio-Cultural  
Community works to  
build a safer, stronger  
future for the region.





## Viewpoint:

### **Dato Paduka Seri Haji Aminuddin Ihsan bin Pehin Dato Seri Paduka Haji Abidin**

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Brunei Darussalam,  
Chair of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council 2021

**On 1 January 2021, Brunei Darussalam assumed the ASEAN Chairmanship for 2021.**

**Minister Aminuddin talks to The ASEAN about how Brunei Darussalam will work to accelerate efforts to recover from the pandemic and reach the goal of ASEAN solidarity.**

**With the world facing significant economic and social challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, how will Brunei Darussalam's ASEAN 2021 priorities, through its ASEAN Chairmanship Theme, "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper," contribute towards post-pandemic recovery efforts?**

**Minister Aminuddin:** ASEAN has long recognised that its vision and aspirations need to be closely intertwined with global affairs and development. Towards this, Brunei Darussalam, together with the other ASEAN Member States, will continue the tradition of aligning our chairmanship's agenda in response to current and emerging issues, to create an enabling environment, so as to build a stronger ASEAN, which is better prepared, more strategic, holistic and coordinated in its responses.

In this context, against the backdrop of the unprecedented year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted every aspect of our peoples' lives, Brunei



Darussalam's ASEAN 2021 theme, "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper," resonates with ASEAN's collective commitment to harness the caring nature of the ASEAN Community; to prepare and adapt for the future and ensure ASEAN remains relevant through the many complex challenges; whilst creating opportunities for the

people to benefit through ASEAN-led cross-cutting initiatives and frameworks towards enhanced sustainable prosperity of the region. In tandem, Brunei Darussalam's priorities will also be reflective of ASEAN's past commitments with renewed aspiration in consolidating and strengthening ASEAN's common goals.



**Brunei Darussalam’s ASEAN 2021 theme, “We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper,” resonates with ASEAN’s collective commitment to harness the caring nature of the ASEAN Community**

The theme for ASEAN 2021 will also re-emphasise ASEAN’s strong resolution towards its Community Vision 2025, as well as advancing the work on the Post-2025 Vision in forging ahead, building upon, and deepening its integration process. This is to realise a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN Community, with now an even greater resolve to strategise ASEAN’s initiatives to counter any challenges, through new and existing tools and initiatives of both policy and practical relevance. We will also continue to further harness the lessons learned from the “pandemic normality” and look into ways we can strengthen ASEAN’s engagement with its partners through existing or new mechanisms, as well as look into the possibility of establishing new partnerships through a forward-looking and proactive approach that ensures mutual respect and benefit.

**The theme “We Care” is among the areas to be addressed under Brunei Darussalam’s ASEAN chairmanship this year. How does Brunei Darussalam hope to foster this within the ASCC pillar?**

**Minister Aminuddin:** One of the core elements of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community is to build a community of caring and sharing societies, emphasising a stronger sense of community of shared interests, with its people at its centre, confronting common challenges.

The caring nature of ASEAN has led to the adoption of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and its Implementation Plan to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic while safeguarding peoples’ health and well-being. At the same time, ASEAN Vision 2025 continues to inculcate a committed, participative, and socially-

responsible Community. In that spirit, we are encouraging a more committed ASEAN Community, particularly the youth, to take that leading role, together with the support of ASEAN’s relevant stakeholders, to give back to society, through volunteerism and support. This is also in line with the ASEAN Secretariat’s initiatives on ASEAN Aid, as well as the current discussion on the revision of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Fund.

Tolerance and understanding also reflect the “we-nature” of ASEAN, through its many commonalities and appreciation of our rich, diverse culture of understanding and tolerance. His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam, at the 32nd ASEAN Summit in 2018, raised the importance of fostering understanding, tolerance, and a sense of regional agendas among the peoples of ASEAN in light of the many global and regional uncertainties. Culture, education, sports, greater information accessibility, and other initiatives to showcase the benefits of living harmoniously are some of the examples to foster greater regional understanding and tolerance.

In this regard, ASEAN is currently working together with the ASEAN Secretariat, Japan, and other stakeholders, to submit a Regional Policy Framework of Fostering Greater Understanding and a Sense of Regional Agendas among the Peoples of ASEAN, as one of the outcomes of the ASEAN Summits in 2021. It is Brunei Darussalam’s hope that promoting understanding and tolerance will uphold ASEAN’s principles of shared values, norms, and unity through dialogue and cooperation under all the ASCC Sectoral Bodies. This would also play a complementary role in promoting regional agendas of stability and development, as reflected in the characteristics of the ASCC Blueprint.

*ASEAN Young Professional Volunteer Corps (AYPVC) conducting an oral care awareness campaign in a kindergarden in Hue City, Vietnam*

Photo Credit: © Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Brunei Darussalam







*Taman Mahkota Jubli Emas,  
Bandar Seri Begawan*

**Brunei Darussalam's priorities focus on cross-pillar and cross-sectoral initiatives with greater attention on the effectiveness of the ASEAN Secretariat. What does this entail, and what are Brunei Darussalam's expectations on this priority?**

**Minister Aminuddin:** While facing new challenges, ASEAN should not forget its other existing challenges. In realising a well-adapted and well-prepared ASEAN, it is even more crucial to establish appropriate platforms to coordinate efforts. This is to ensure that ASEAN will remain relevant and continuously take advantage of new opportunities, while advancing the work of a Post-2025 Vision. As we look at the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework's strategies, we should

further focus on the greater aspects of how the ASCC could also contribute and assist in the economic development of ASEAN and beyond.

The envisioned improved quality of life calls for an enabling mechanism to look into alternative economic and social policies, measures, and practices to support and build a caring economy, particularly for vulnerable groups. There is also a growing challenge to address the sustainability of investment in care through greater access to social protection systems so as to become an indispensable part of the economic growth of ASEAN. An investment in a caring economy, featuring those aspired and outlined in ASEAN's declarations, statements, blueprints, and plans of action, will also promote inclusivity and equal opportunities for the people of ASEAN, while taking advantage of technology-driven innovations. This is where

the vital role of the ASEAN Secretariat comes in, which the ASCC needs to explore further.

**What are Brunei Darussalam's long-term expectations for the ASCC Pillar?**

**Minister Aminuddin:** The year 2021 is a turning point for all, more so for the ASCC Pillar, as it is also known as the Peoples' Pillar. The pandemic, as mentioned earlier, intensely highlighted the inter-connectedness of the world; and for us to be aware of the changing trends and demographics of ourselves and others. This requires us to re-imagine and even re-engineer how ASEAN and its institutions work at the most fundamental level, on how we work with each other and our partners, to realise our respective potential.

The questions we need to frequently ask are:

- (i) Are we future-ready?
- (ii) How can we make ASEAN's work beneficial to its people and also its partners?
- (iii) Are we forward-looking or proactive in our work?
- (iv) Is the ASCC doing the work that it is mandated to do in the ASEAN Charter?

The key to all these is ASEAN centrality and its mechanisms. It is in ASEAN's interest to continue to establish strong and diverse engagement with its existing and new partners while maintaining mutual respect and benefit; as part of building blocks to maintain peace, stability, and security of the region. ■



**This requires us to re-imagine and even re-engineer on how ASEAN and its institutions work at the most fundamental level, on how we work with each other and our partners, to realise our respective potential.**

Health

# COVID-19 RECOVERY:

## Balancing Regional Decisions



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**As the COVID-19 pandemic raged across the globe in 2020, nations imposed containment measures with varying success levels. For every decision to implement strict measures to help save lives, there have been devastating impacts on livelihoods and economies.**

Now, countries are slowly rolling out several approved COVID-19 vaccines to inoculate front liners, health workers, and vulnerable populations. The virus has mutated to other variants that are feared to be more infectious. Governments still grapple with tough decisions to further contain transmission while mitigating the pandemic's socio-economic impact. The **ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF)** and its Implementation Plan, adopted by the 37th ASEAN Summit on 12 November 2020, lays out the implementation of five broad strategies to support the ASEAN region in their whole-of-community responses to COVID-19. Included in the ACRF is Broad Strategy 1 on Enhancing Health Systems.

In line with the ACRF, the health sector, with valuable support from the German Corporation for International Cooperation or GIZ, launched a series of webinars on the region's COVID-19 response. It kicked off with "Enhancing Health Systems and Resilience in the Context of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework" on 15 December 2020. Expert panel members from ASEAN Member States and distinguished resource persons from various international organisations deliberated on the priorities under Broad Strategy 1.

As noted by ASEAN Deputy Secretary-General for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Kung Phoak in his opening remarks, "It is essential that we strengthen cooperation on capacity

building interventions on public health emergency preparedness and response; continually share critical lessons learned and good practices; coordinate resource mobilisation including technical assistance; and engage more in policy dialogues relevant to the latest development on COVID-19 including drug and vaccine development, security and self-reliance."

The outcome of these webinar series is a set of policy briefs, which will be elevated to the ASEAN Health Sector for consideration, to strengthen the collective response to the pandemic.

Dr. Eduardo Banzon, Asian Development Bank (ADB) Principal Health Specialist, said that non-pharmaceutical interventions would only slow down the virus's transmission, not stop it. The ADB has provided support programs to cushion the pandemic's economic impact. Banzon emphasised, however, that "it is a health emergency crisis and for it to end, a health system-based solution must be delivered." He added that "strengthening health systems, sustained financing and implementation of universal health coverage, and timely access to safe and effective vaccinations, combined with non-pharmaceutical interventions are needed to stop the spread of COVID-19."

"Digital Technology for the Enhancement of Healthcare Delivery" was the second webinar's focus on 15 January 2021. Shared during the presentations was the use of digital technology in contact tracing, the most critical measurement in containing the coronavirus. Dr. San-Il Kim, Head of the Digital Transformation Division and Senior Management Member of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health, described how Switzerland used the



Photo Credit: © myboys.me/Shutterstock





SwissCovid App effectively early in the pandemic. “The app was released in summer 2020. The aim was to be anonymous, as the app system does not use personal data. The COVID code activation system only saves the user’s information related to (the) contact tracing team,” explained San-Il Kim. He added that Singapore first brought up the idea of digital contact tracing through Bluetooth technology.

The series’ third webinar, held on 19 January 2021, deliberated on the “Safe Reopening of Economies and Communities in the New Normal Era.” The discussions examined strategies that countries and communities can adopt to balance protecting public health and get the economy back on track.

Dr. Masaya Kato of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office in the South East Asia Region stressed that countries must prioritise strengthening their health systems. He added that the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies provides an excellent framework.

Kato said WHO has developed guidelines for implementing and adjusting public health and social measures in the context of COVID-19.

“To inform the calibration of public health and social measures, we recommend conducting a situational assessment using the local data of each country and each sub-national level,” Kato said. The situational level, he added, is determined by two variables, the level of transmission (i.e., no transmission, sporadic, cluster, or community transmission) and the health system’s response capacity (e.g., hospital capacity, ability to conduct contact tracing).

“Combining the level of transmission and health system response capacity, we can assign a situational level which can guide decisions on implementing and adjusting public health and social measures,” Kato said.

According to Kato, authorities need to consider additional measures as soon as the situation deteriorates; otherwise, it can increase mortality and even tighten measures.

Anurag Agrawal of the Boston Consulting Group said that based on the data, controlling the virus is vital if countries hope to reopen their economies safely. He proposed four “epinomic” (i.e., epidemiological and socio-economic) imperatives for the safe resumption of economic activities: specificity, speed, stringency, and support.

A review of countries’ responses shows that an early lockdown without corresponding containment measures does not work. “When speed and stringency (of measures) come together, that’s when the length of the outbreak is dramatically shortened,” Agrawal said.

Agrawal added that imposing stringent measures and providing economic support to affected businesses and vulnerable populations will also ensure a more effective response. “Greater economic support allows people to adhere to stringent measures and to stay in their homes,” he said. Economic support can be in the form of income support and debt relief programme.

With COVID-19 vaccines now available, the challenge is for countries to get enough supply for their population and ensure that they are ready and willing to receive the vaccination.

As German Ambassador to ASEAN Peter Schoof said in his remarks, “the ACRF leaves no doubt that many of its measures will only be applicable once an effective vaccine is widely available. Before that, we can only practice damage control but no economic recovery of any relevant standard and long-lasting effect.”

Nations now face the daunting task of procuring approved COVID-19 vaccines and inoculating enough of their populations to achieve herd immunity. Dr. Wisit Tangkeangsirisin from Thailand’s National Vaccine Institute (NVI) said “the timely distribution of vaccines” is ASEAN’s priority. NVI spearheads the ASEAN Vaccine Security and Self-Reliance (AVSSR), adopted by ASEAN Leaders before the pandemic on 2 November 2019.

According to Tangkeangsirisin, “the timely and equitable access to affordable and quality-assured COVID-19 vaccine(s) will be the focus of the first phase for the urgent implementation of the Plan,” as guided by the July 2020 Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development.

UNICEF Immunization Specialist Dr. Ruhul Amin highlighted the complexity of procuring and distributing multiple vaccines. UNICEF works together with the GAVI Alliance, WHO, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) in the COVAX vaccine facility that is designed to ensure the equitable distribution of approved vaccines. UNICEF works with manufacturers in COVID-19 vaccine procurement. COVAX facility has negotiated with vaccine manufacturers for 3 billion doses of vaccines, with 2.3 billion as an advance purchase agreement funded by donors.

Most ASEAN Member States have joined the COVAX facility and will benefit from the two billion vaccine doses it plans to access from manufacturers by the end of 2021. Several experts on the panel warned against the danger of vaccine nationalism. They stressed that countries need to approach national vaccination drives as part of a global effort to ensure enough safe vaccines will reach those who need them most, particularly in countries that cannot afford them.

In the discussions, several experts emphasised that vaccinations alone would not work to beat the pandemic. It is crucial to continue strengthening health systems; assessing and enforcing safety protocols, and responding with the appropriate measures.

ASEAN nations will have to make tough decisions to save lives and livelihoods during this pandemic. The health sector is committed to provide platforms where the Member States can share knowledge, expertise, and best practices and build and strengthen partnerships as they navigate towards a post-COVID-19 recovery. ■



Learn more about **The ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and Implementation Plan** <https://asean.org/asean-comprehensive-recovery-framework-implementation-plan/>



Health

# The Cascading Disaster of COVID-19

## Renewed Calls for a More Robust Regional Coordination System

### ASEAN-USAID PROSPECT PROJECT

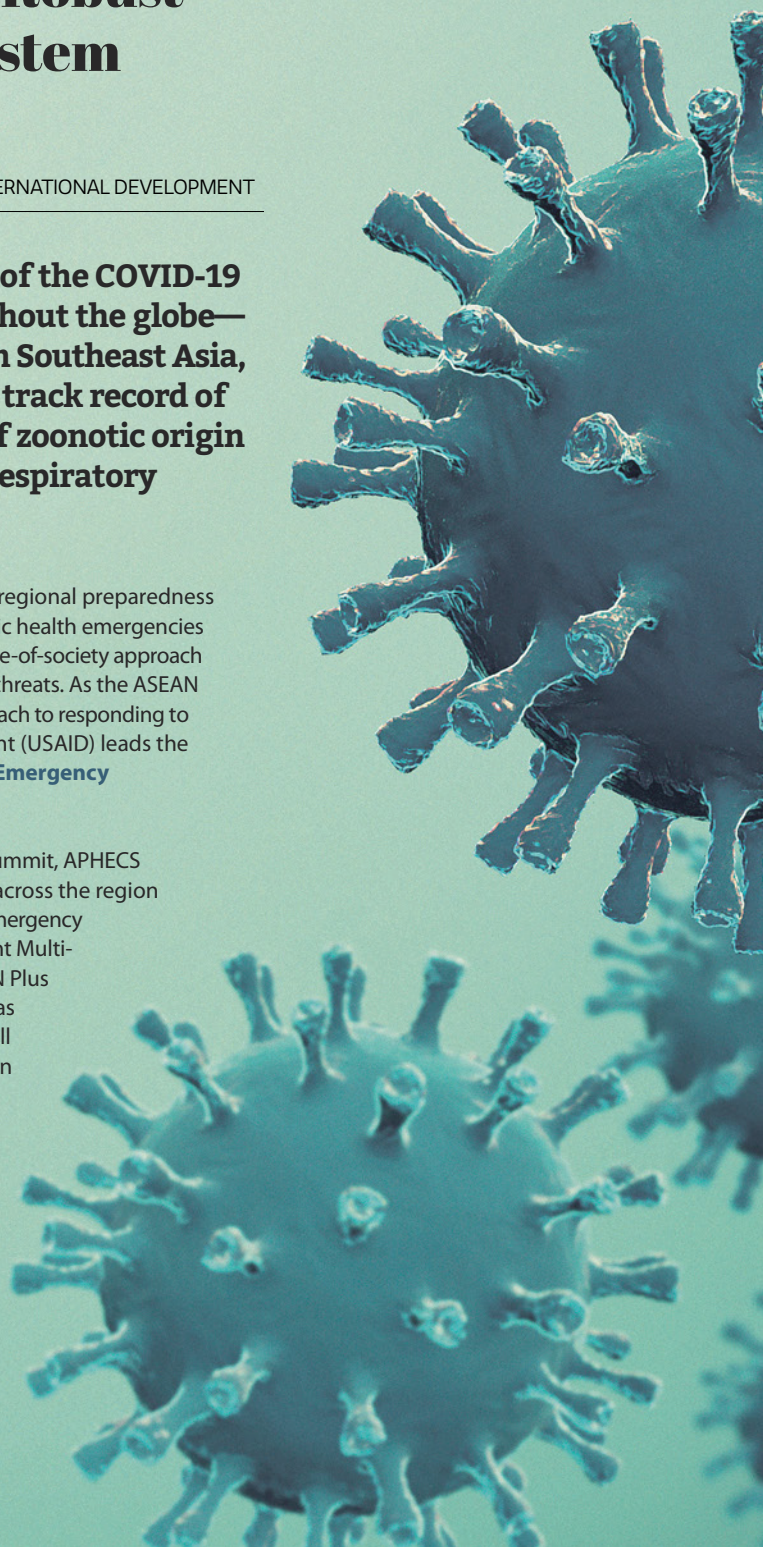
FUNDED BY THE US GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**The unprecedented spread and devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic have tested communities throughout the globe—even those considered to be well-prepared. In Southeast Asia, ASEAN Member States boast of a successful track record of dealing with infectious disease outbreaks of zoonotic origin such as Avian Influenza and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).**

**C** COVID-19 has highlighted, however, shortfalls in national and regional preparedness and response systems. Notably, the crisis has shown how public health emergencies can impact every facet of our daily lives, thus galvanising a whole-of-society approach to recovery efforts as well as a renewed vigor for preparing for future threats. As the ASEAN Health Sector works to establish a stronger, more unified regional approach to responding to future crises, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) leads the US Government's efforts to support the new **ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System (APHECS)**.

Recently highlighted in the Chairman's Statement of the 36th ASEAN Summit, APHECS seeks to integrate the many existing coordination mechanisms from across the region and disparate sectors within a single cohesive platform (e.g. ASEAN Emergency Operations Centre Network for Public Health Emergencies, ASEAN Joint Multi-Sectoral Outbreak Investigation and Response System, and the ASEAN Plus Three Field Epidemiology Training Network). As the current pandemic has underscored, every second counts when it comes to mitigating the toll of a public health emergency. Efficient coordination and communication can save lives and livelihoods.

Once established, APHECS will help ASEAN better employ a rapid joint outbreak investigation response and share technical expertise and resources, including logistical management for sharing medical supplies. For the first time, APHECS will provide a unified, multisectoral institutional framework with public health emergency preparedness and response standard operating procedures. This structure will enable the ASEAN Member States to prepare for and respond collectively to public health emergencies, mitigate the impact of future outbreaks, and manage assistance to the affected Member States.







**Such support builds upon the long partnership between ASEAN and the United States to jointly address diverse transnational challenges and previous US Government support to enhance Member States' capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to existing and emerging pandemic threats.**

Under the leadership of the Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development (SOMHD), the development of APHECS will align with ASEAN's Strategic Framework for Public Health Emergencies, Post-2015 Health Development Agenda, and other priorities governed by the ASEAN Community's post-pandemic recovery framework. The multi-year initiative is supported with technical assistance from the US Government through USAID and the ASEAN-USAID Partnership for Regional Optimization within the Political-Security and Socio-Cultural Communities (PROSPECT) project. Such support builds upon the long partnership between ASEAN and the United States to jointly address diverse transnational challenges and previous US Government support to enhance Member States' capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to existing and emerging pandemic threats.

Implementation will progress in **four phases**: Phase 1 – Assessment; Phase 2 – Development of the APHECS Framework; Phase 3 – Institutional Arrangements and Standard Operating Procedures; and Phase 4 – Operationalisation (including training, table-top exercises, and monitoring and evaluation).

Development of APHECS will be undertaken with an evidence-based, inclusive, and consultative approach, starting off with an initial assessment conducted in the first half of 2021. Each phase of development will be guided by a Technical Advisory Group comprised of key stakeholders and will involve regular consultations with representatives from other ASEAN Dialogue Partners, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), among others.



## ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System (APHECS) Phases of Development

### Phase 1: Initial Assessment

- Review existing system and entities
- Consult stakeholders
- Design APHECS framework



### Phase 2: APHECS Framework

- Member States agree on APHECS function, structure, and principles
- Legally binding instrument



### Phase 3: Institutional Setup

- Institutional arrangements, including resourcing
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPS)



### Phase 4: Operationalisation

- Training
- Table-top exercise
- Monitoring and evaluation mechanism



Critical to this effort is ensuring alignment with several new and ongoing initiatives of the ASEAN Health sector and its partners to fortify regional preparedness and response capacity. The design of APHECS will seek to complement the planned **ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED)**, which is being supported by Japan. The establishment of ACPHEED was announced by the ASEAN Leaders during the 37th Summit under Viet Nam's Chairmanship on 12 November 2020. According to Mr. Dhannan Sunoto, former Director of the ASEAN Secretariat Cross-Sectoral Cooperation Department, helping to lead this USAID effort, discussions with representatives of the Japan-supported initiative were initiated last year and will continue. "When working with multiple partners, there is a risk of duplication or even contradiction across initiatives," Mr. Sunoto explained. "At the same time, there is greater opportunity to achieve synergies and tap into a broader set of expertise, ideas, and resources." He added, "Resources are a challenge for everyone these days; it is imperative we work smarter by working together and realising efficiencies." To this end, USAID will work with the ASEAN Secretariat Health Division to regularly convene an ASEAN Project Coordinating Meeting (APCM) to facilitate these ongoing conversations amongst relevant stakeholders and partners involved in parallel interventions at the regional level.

One of the many hard lessons learned from the pandemic is that proactive coordination and effective and clear communication are critical during a crisis. This lesson will be enshrined in establishing APHECS, which will provide the framework, platform, and tools for exchange among the ASEAN Member States and partners, across countries and sectors. As the ASEAN Community embarks on an ambitious post-pandemic recovery agenda, APHECS—as part of the suite of new preparedness and response efforts—will reinforce ASEAN's ability to meet the challenges of today, as well as those of tomorrow. ■

*Views expressed in this article are of the ASEAN-USAID PROSPECT project and not the United States Government.*



## Education and Youth

# PREPARING ASEAN LEARNERS FOR THE FUTURE



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*THE ASEAN*

**Delivering quality education to prepare today's learners for the challenges of a rapidly changing, highly globalised, and technology-driven world has been the overarching goal of ASEAN Member States for many years.**

This is articulated in the **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint**, the **ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2016-2020**, and each Member State's national education plan.

Yet, this goal seems further away today with the unparalleled disruption brought by the COVID-19 pandemic to national educational systems region-wide. School closures have interrupted the schooling of over 150 million students. Almost overnight, education ministries, school administrators, and teachers have to develop alternative modes of delivery and scramble for resources.

The shift to online learning is particularly fraught with numerous challenges. They range from weak broadband infrastructure, learners' limited digital skills and lack of access to computer and internet connection, to mental health concerns arising from isolation, exclusion, and accessibility issues.

On top of these, national education systems continue to grapple with old familiar problems, particularly disparities in education access and quality—due to gender, income, disability, and geography—that were made more glaring by the crisis.







**The regional bloc believes that education is front and centre in helping countries prepare not only for the future of work, but also for building people's resilience against future shocks like global pandemics.**

ASEAN Member States, individually and collectively, faced these challenges head on.

At the **Eleventh ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (11th ASED)**, Secretary-General of ASEAN Dato Lim Jock Hoi said, "Despite this crisis, education cannot wait. Education simply cannot stop, particularly for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who may fall even further behind. There is greater urgency to ensure that these learners do not suffer from disproportionate learning losses, and that they are not at risk of dropping out and never returning to school."

At the national level, ministries of education made an effort to train teachers on conferencing technology as well as online pedagogy, develop new modules and materials, and provide access to computer devices.

For the digitally excluded, other modes of teaching were introduced.

"In an effort to remain true to the principles of equity and inclusion, offline approaches such as radio and TV-based instruction were also provided to learners who currently do not enjoy access to Internet and digital technologies," said Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi during the 11th ASED.

At the ASEAN level, national efforts to address this crisis were supported primarily through agenda-setting, policy and programme guidance and commitment, and knowledge-sharing.

The ASEAN ministers of education, for example, convened the **Conference on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems throughout ASEAN** in October 2020 where they committed to promote digital literacy and a safe cyber environment for children and youth, and to tap the private sector in developing and improving access to innovative digital learning solutions.

The regional bloc believes that education is front and centre in helping countries prepare not only for the future of work, but also for building people's resilience against future shocks like global pandemics. This is reflected in a number of instruments issued in 2020 that aim to help Member States recover from the COVID-19-induced crisis.



The **ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework** and its implementation plan aim to strengthen human capital development by, among others, ensuring that digital and 21st century skills are taught in basic education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education. The framework also encourages the use of ICT in education delivery to speed up digital transformation.

The **ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work** and its roadmap seek to promote lifelong learning and inclusive education. The roadmap includes activities to digitally transform education in our region, with emphasis on promoting digital literacy and 21st century skills, digital infrastructure development, online platforms, and open educational resources.

The establishment of the **ASEAN Technical and Vocational Education and Training Council** is meant to foster skills development to make people employable and productive, match job requirements and skills, facilitate career mobility, and encourage entrepreneurship. The Council aims to carry out research and development, quality assessment of programmes, and capacity building of trainers.

The ASEAN education sector is formulating its **2021-2025 Work Plan on Education** to set its targets and priority actions in the next five years. The work plan is envisaged to be underpinned by the principles of lifelong learning, inclusion, equity, and quality. It also seeks to address the needs and situations of all learners in the region.

Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Kung Phoak said that the challenges and lessons learned in the previous education work plan must inform the new work plan, and that it must be strategic, focused, targeted, and measurable.

"The success of the next five-year work plan is also contingent upon ASEAN Member States' determination to shepherd activities through to completion. In this regard, I urge all Member States to consider leading or co-leading activities in the work plan," Deputy Secretary-General Kung said. ■





# Sports MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

## WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER WITH SPORTS



**CHRISTY LAI**

ASSISTANT MANAGER, SPORTS DIVISION, MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH SINGAPORE  
AND ASEAN SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING ON SPORTS (SOMS) SINGAPORE TEAM

**Year 2020 was a year fraught with unprecedented challenges in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet it is the throes of adversity that bring out the best in us, no better exemplified than by how ASEAN has weathered many crises and emerged even stronger and more confident together over the past decades.**

### **ASEAN Sports Sector**

Sports is a strong binding force in bringing ASEAN Member States closer, and it has been especially true during this trying period. Recognising the importance of ASEAN unity in crisis, the pandemic did not deter officials from coming together to push our agenda forward. For the first time, the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Sports (SOMS) was conducted virtually as One ASEAN

Community in October 2020 for the 10th and 11th SOMS and the 3rd SOMS Plus Japan. These meetings saw ASEAN Member States reaffirm their commitment to sports development and mark the successful conclusion of the 1st ASEAN Work Plan on Sports, or AWPS (2016-2020).

### **ASEAN Work Plan on Sports**

Since the advent of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting of Sports (AMMS) in 2011, ASEAN

has seen tremendous growth in the sports sector. Through various regional activities and programmes, the 1st AWPS (2016-2020) was instrumental in forging stronger cohesion among Member States, and in the process, growing our people-to-people ties and building more resilient communities.

Sports has also been an excellent platform for ASEAN friendship and cultural exchanges and community-building events. The 6th World Sports for All Games under the auspices of the Association for International Sport for All (TAFISA) in Jakarta and the 5th Asian Beach Games in Danang, both of which were held in 2016, sought to instill values of mutual understanding and sportsmanship through traditional ASEAN sports and games. At the national level, ASEAN Member States celebrated heritage sports that



involved their local communities, such as the annual Traditional and Dragon Boat Races in Cambodia and Lao PDR, respectively, and Ledwhay events in Myanmar. Malaysia and the Philippines put up an excellent show in hosting the 29th Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, the 10th ASEAN Para Games 2017, and the 30th SEA Games 2019. Meanwhile, the 8th ASEAN School Games in Chiang Mai and ASEAN Youth Programme Camp 2019 in Berakas brought ASEAN student-athletes and youth leaders together in the spirit of ASEAN friendship.

Although 2020 was a game-changer for physical sporting events, this did not hamper sports from continuing to touch

*Singapore rallies her peoples for a virtual sporting experience in GetActive! Singapore 2020 to commemorate ASEAN Sports Day and celebrate Singapore's 55th National Day*

people's lives in other ways. Rallying its residents to keep active through sports, Singapore commemorated the ASEAN Sports Day through a virtual edition of the *Get Active! Singapore 2020*. The **ASEAN Youth Sport 4 Development, Peace and Leadership 2020** project, implemented by Right to Play Foundation Thailand, saw youth leaders collaborating with their ASEAN peers virtually to promote sports and healthy lifestyles in their local communities through ground-up projects.

Complementing such ground-up initiatives were collaborations forged with international organisations. ASEAN and the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) established a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2019. On top of enhancing professional capacity building, the MoU seeks to foster life skills through football in schools across ASEAN via their FIFA's

Football for Schools Program. In the **ASEAN-FIFA Joint Awareness Raising Campaign**, ASEAN Sports Ambassadors were nominated to promote healthy and active lifestyles to improve the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of the ASEAN Community. Such international collaborations are a significant step in enhancing and strengthening ASEAN efforts to better communities' lives via sports.

ASEAN also reaffirmed its commitment to fight against doping in sports. With the Southeast Asia Regional Anti-Doping Organisation's (SEARADO) assistance, Lao PDR successfully set up their National Anti-Doping Organisation, while Cambodia, Myanmar, and the Philippines enhanced their anti-doping capabilities with SEARADO's Doping Control Officers and Therapeutic Use Exemption courses. SEARADO's assiduous efforts have continued to



Photo Credit: © SOMS Singapore Team



## Sports will continue to play a critical role as the world emerges from the global COVID-19 pandemic and makes sense of its impact and implications.

be instrumental in the ASEAN Member States' steady progress in this area.

SOMS is pleased to note the successful conclusion of the AWPS (2016-2020), which is an important milestone for the ASEAN sports sector, and a testament to the Member States' commitment to developing a robust sporting culture in ASEAN.

### Singapore's Chairmanship of AMMS/SOMS 2021

Building on the spirit of cooperation and consensus in realising the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, Singapore, as the AMMS and SOMS Chair in 2021, has been working closely with fellow member states in finalising the next AWPS (2021-2025) for its formal adoption. As Chair of the 2021 AMMS, Singapore plans to fulfil the following deliverables:

As a founding city of the global Active Citizens Worldwide (ACW) programme, Singapore will be leading the ASEAN ACW research study project in 2021. The research study to be presented at AMMS-6 will help ASEAN Member States draw insights and ideas for evidence-based reference in policymaking for sports, enabling more informed sports-related policies to positively impact individuals and communities in the region. It will also be an opportunity to update and pivot our strategies in the light of lessons learned from our COVID-19 experiences.

To drive closer collaboration in anti-doping efforts across the region, Singapore is facilitating the signing of an MoU between ASEAN and the World Anti-Doping Agency, which represents ASEAN Member States' collective resolve to protecting clean sports.

To improve support for our ASEAN athletes on their path to international sporting stages, Singapore will seek to build consensus on the standardisation of SEA Games sports to provide more consistency in its roster selection, to facilitate better planning for our ASEAN athletes' sporting journeys and pathways.

### Looking to the Future

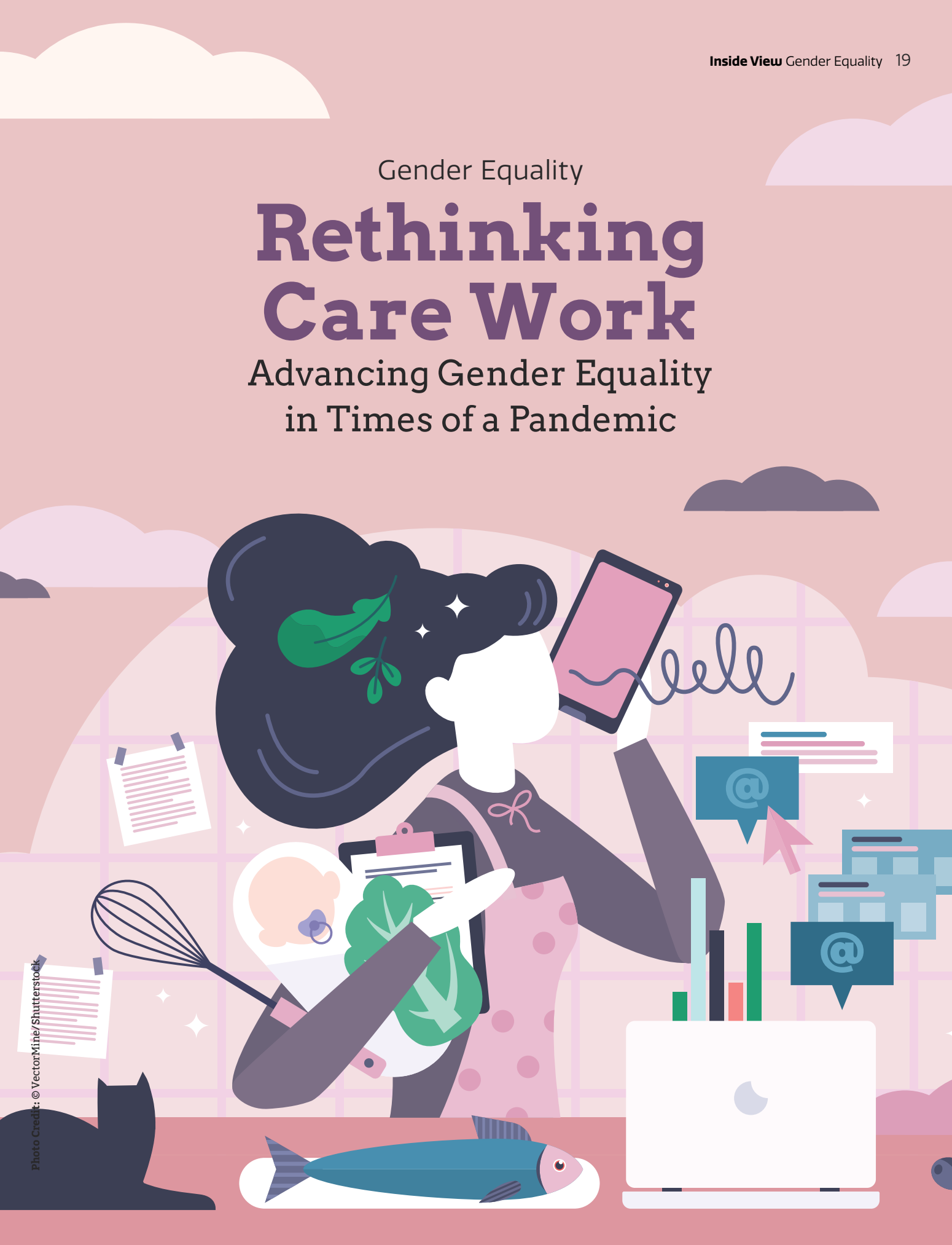
Sports will continue to play a critical role as the world emerges from the global COVID-19 pandemic and makes sense of its impact and implications. Indeed, sports has emerged as even more critical to the wellbeing of individuals and society. We eagerly anticipate the resumption of our sporting events and activities under a new normal. With a few major sporting events in the pipeline this year, such as the upcoming Tokyo Olympic Games, 31st Hanoi SEA Games, and 11th ASEAN Para Games, there is much to look forward to in 2021 and beyond. It is our hope that sports will continue to hold the ASEAN fabric together as we move forward in solidarity towards a stronger and more resilient ASEAN Community. ■



Gender Equality

# Rethinking Care Work

Advancing Gender Equality  
in Times of a Pandemic







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**“Women are naturally nurturing and empathetic. They are intrinsically more suited to caring for children and families.” This worldview, which dominates many cultures to this day, is the epitome of *gender essentialism*. It appears commonsensical, but it has harmed generations of women—and society at large. It has led to exclusion, discrimination, exploitation, and inequality.**

Care and care work, which are indispensable to maintain the health, safety, and well-being of societies and economies, are left mostly to women. While professional care services and occupations are remunerated, care duties within the family remain unpaid. Understood mainly as natural to women and their innate abilities to care and to share, unpaid care is, on the contrary, a result of social or contractual obligations, such as marriage, family relations, and kinship, which are deeply entrenched in gender norms and stereotypes.

Unpaid and invisible care perpetuates gender inequality by creating a cycle of continual disempowerment for women and girls. From a vantage point of power relations, unpaid care and domestic work are a systemic impediment to women's empowerment. It curtails women's choices, bargaining position, and economic opportunities, and deprives women of a precious resource—time.

For the less privileged, poor, rural, and marginalised women, these heavy and disproportionate tasks are even more intractable as they cannot afford domestic help. They also have far

less access to services and technology, trapping them in time and income poverty across their life-cycle.

While statistics do not capture the qualitative and emotive experiences of shouldering care work and household chores, it is illuminating to learn that, on average, women spent 5.4 hours per day on care as a primary activity. For men, it was merely under one hour (0.99). As for childcare, an average of 78 per cent of women had been responsible for a child, compared to 48 per cent of men (UNESCAP, 2020). Alarming, this pattern was also observed among the younger population, with girls spending 0.44 hours on average per day on care work compared to 0.25 hours for boys.

In terms of economic contributions, data from 53 countries estimate that unpaid care work would amount to 9 per cent of global GDP, equivalent to 11 trillion US dollars of purchasing power parity. Unpaid care and domestic work are valued at around 40 per cent of GDP (ILO, 2018).

Although this pivotal issue intersects poverty, deprivation, and human rights, it receives little visibility in policymaking.

It has also not received sufficient investment from governments, businesses, and communities, be it in infrastructure, work arrangements, or commitment to structural change.

The COVID-19 pandemic turned global attention to the gendered dimension of the crisis: women's safety, economic and social security, and institutional support have been jeopardised. Moreover, in households, females bear the burden of additional domestic chores and child care because of the reduced availability of formal and informal care services during the lockdowns.

At present, systematic and comprehensive data and analysis on gendered impacts of COVID-19 have yet to be made available. Nonetheless, existing smaller-scale studies offer a ray of hope. Studies found that given the closure of facilities and the shift to flexible work arrangements, many men are more exposed to the double burden of paid and unpaid work. Altered work arrangements may lead to men's or fathers' increased involvement in care work, changing social norms, and bringing an equal division of care and domestic responsibilities (World Bank, 2020). In households where women work in healthcare and other essential services for COVID-19 response, many men are likely to turn into primary informal care providers for the family (OECD, 2020).

Perhaps the lesson we are learning from the ongoing pandemic is that while the pandemic may reinforce stereotypical gender roles, it also offers an unprecedented opportunity to shift them. In the future, we may see an



**The Gender Outlook reveals that in ASEAN, 30 per cent of women noted increases in the intensity of domestic work since the spread of the virus, compared to only 16 per cent among men.**



increased redistribution of care work in households where men/fathers have more work flexibility.

As for ASEAN, the issue of care work has gained distinct prominence during this pandemic. The first **ASEAN Women's Leaders' Summit** on the theme "Women's Role in Building A Cohesive, Dynamic, Sustainable and Inclusive ASEAN Community in a Post COVID-19 World" held in November 2020 affirmed the Leaders' commitment to recognise and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work as well as enhance welfare and development of all women and girls.

Unpaid care and domestic work also lie at the **ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework's** heart and its implementation plan. The framework emphasises mainstreaming gender equality throughout the recovery scheme and actions with the commitment to address unpaid care and domestic work to enable women to be drivers of the recovery process with the provision of expanded, accessible social safety nets, social assistance, and social insurance programmes especially for women in vulnerable groups.

These efforts are backed by strengthening research and evidence. The soon to be

launched **ASEAN Gender Outlook: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman and Girl Behind** sheds light on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on care and domestic work in the region. The *Gender Outlook* reveals that in ASEAN, 30 per cent of women noted increases in the intensity of domestic work since the spread of the virus, compared to only 16 per cent among men. The increase in workload at home means that women sacrifice paid employment to tend to household needs, with obvious consequences for their income and well-being.

The signs of changing gender roles, the possibility of addressing inequality, and progress in policy visibility and political will are encouraging developments. However, we are aware that a lot of work still needs to be done to tackle unpaid care and domestic work effectively. From individuals, communities, to governments, all of us must recognise, value, and highlight the full extent of women's work and their contributions to productive and reproductive economies.

While the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis are yet to be fully uncovered, it provides a window of opportunity to build more inclusive and resilient systems. Care needs to be regarded as a universal right and thus a national and regional policy agenda. Comprehensive care systems that harness co-shared responsibility between men and women, the state, the market, households, and the community are needed. To effectively reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, care policy arrangements must be complemented by labour market policies that support work-life balance for gender equality. This support will enable both women and men to reconcile their job and care responsibilities better.

Fundamentally, we need to go beyond the essentialist view that women are better at giving care and should be relegated throughout their lives regardless of circumstances. We need to redefine our values and norms, change gender role expectations and socialisation, and elevate gender discourse within our families and communities to promote care as a *social and collective responsibility and not a woman's destiny*. ■

## Labour and Civil Service

# Putting Workers First



**MEGA IRENA**  
HEAD, LABOUR AND CIVIL SERVICE DIVISION  
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT



**KIRAN SAGOO, PHD**  
SENIOR OFFICER, ANALYSIS DIVISION  
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY DEPARTMENT

**In response to the rapidly changing work landscape in the region, ASEAN's labour sector has been working hard to ensure that people in the region, especially its youth, will be well equipped with needed skills.**

### Developing a Resilient and Future-Ready Workforce

Achievements in 2020 include the adoption of the **ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work**.

In collaboration with ASEAN's education sector, the Declaration aims to cultivate an ASEAN workforce to become competent, relevant and able to contribute to the region's sustainable development, and resiliency. There is now a roadmap that guides the multi-stakeholder initiatives in 2021 onwards. Activities are geared towards cultivating lifelong learning, improving the inclusiveness of education, increasing employment opportunities to higher quality of jobs, and developing strong human resource development frameworks, among others.

One of the contributing sectors is the ASEAN Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Council. Established last year, the Council envisions graduates with market-responsive workforce skills and greater employment opportunities, among others.

### Improving Quality of Life

Achievements also include increasing the quality of life of workers in the region, made possible through three guidelines. The timely adoption of the **ASEAN Guidelines on Effective Return and Reintegration of Migrant Workers** gives much-needed focus to the vulnerabilities that returning migrant workers are facing. It promotes economic and social



## Migrant Workers and Sustainable Development Goals

TARGET 8-8



Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers, including migrant workers, particularly women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

TARGET 10-7



Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

reintegration, among others, and recommends providing returnees and their families with basic trainings in financial literacy and entrepreneurship. Returning workers bring back social capital in the form of contacts and networks, new ideas and values. This social capital can potentially contribute to the workers' home communities and economies, and therefore, should be harnessed. The Guidelines become even more relevant in this challenging time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much support is needed for the safe return journey of many laid-off or furloughed migrant workers, and also for post-return journey for job opportunities.

### The ASEAN Guidelines on Gender Mainstreaming into Labour and Employment Policies towards Decent Work for All

seeks to promote gender equality in the world of work, in line with international standards. Priority is placed on policies and practices in relation to employment promotion, decent working conditions, social and maternity protection, and international labour migration.

Small and medium enterprises are the primary sources of employment for ASEAN's workforce. The **ASEAN Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Risk Management for Small and Medium Enterprises in the ASEAN Member States** aim to protect workers in these enterprises. The guidelines provide a systematic and objective approach



to identifying hazards, assessing, monitoring, and controlling risks, and reviewing the risk management processes.

Part of the activities of the ASEAN labour sector for 2021 will be ensuring that these Guidelines are socialised and widely used.

#### **Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19**

The ASEAN labour sector has also taken steps to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the region's most vulnerable workers. As noted from the [Joint Statement of ASEAN Labour Ministers on Response to the Impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) on Labour and Employment](#), ministers agreed to strengthen regional solidarity and safeguard the labour rights of workers, including migrant workers.

The joint statement affirms ASEAN's commitment to provide assistance and support to all workers to safeguard their health, safety, and livelihoods, so they can reunite with their families. ASEAN's support

towards migrant workers was further discussed in the 13th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour, held virtually in November 2020. Recommendations include improving the safety and health standards at both the workplace and employer-provided housing. The recommendations also include protection of migrant workers' wages during the pandemic.

The ASEAN labour sector has also worked together with other sectors to contribute to the [ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework's](#) development. In addition, projects to prepare ASEAN's workers and employers for potential pandemics, economic crisis, and natural disasters are included in the ASEAN Labour Ministers' Work Programme 2021-2025.

In this digital era, the civil service must adapt further to technological advances. The social distancing implemented since last year has forced public services to fully utilise technology for effective delivery.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a test to the accountability and responsiveness of public services worldwide.


The [ASEAN Guidelines on Public Service Delivery](#) was adopted in 2020 with the purpose of helping governments provide efficient and effective service delivery to ASEAN citizens. The guidelines share best practices from ASEAN Member States and also from China, Japan and Republic of Korea. The guidelines also provide a framework for setting standards, policy and regulation making, and monitoring.











With the pandemic continuing into 2021, much of the work of the ASEAN labour and civil services sectors has been adjusted in its approaches and focus. Through the newly formulated work plans for 2021-2025, ASEAN labour and civil services sectors have their eyes on people's needs first. Regional cooperation was adapted to the challenges and public needs during and post-pandemic. ■

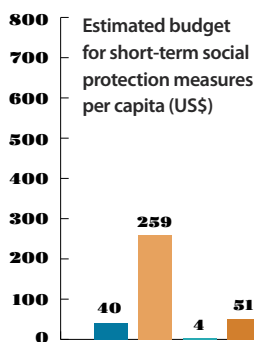


# ASEAN Rapid Assessment The Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods Across ASEAN

Globally and in ASEAN, policymakers must balance public health concerns and economic costs. The severity of the pandemic's impact varies across countries, largely dependent on public health system capacity, informal sector size, initial government containment measures, and economic stimulus responses. Social distancing, quarantine measures, and travel restrictions will likely contain the spread of the virus, but they also impose a serious economic cost, especially in countries that depend on trade and tourism. If ASEAN experiences future outbreaks of the virus, it will be more difficult to close parts of the economy because of lingering economic damage from the first virus wave and increased social and political opposition to shutdowns.



	Overall fiscal measures	Health system measures	Income support	Tax concessions	Other tax expenditure measures	Loans to businesses	Subsidies to businesses	State loan guarantees
 Brunei Darussalam	●	●	-	●	●	●	●	-
 Cambodia	●	●	●	●	●	-	●	-
 Indonesia	●	●	●	●	-	●	-	-
 Lao PDR	●	●	-	●	-	●	●	-
 Malaysia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
 Myanmar	●	●	●	-	-	●	●	-
 Philippines	●	●	●	-	●	●	●	-
 Singapore	●	●	●	-	●	●	●	-
 Thailand	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	-
 Viet Nam	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	-



**Social Protection**  
The overwhelming majority of responses involved social assistance for poor and vulnerable groups. Across the region, approximately 82% of all measures were social assistance interventions.

- Indonesia ● Malaysia ● Myanmar ● Philippines
- Singapore ● Thailand ● Viet Nam



Employment in sectors expected to be highly affected by COVID-19 as % of total employment

ASEAN Member State	Accommodation and food service activities	Wholesale and retail trade	Manufacturing	Transportation and storage	Construction	Total
Brunei Darussalam (2017)	6.6	14.7	3.8	2.8	5.5	33.4
Cambodia (2012)	4.5	17.5	17.4	5.3	6.8	51.6
Lao PDR (2017)	2.3	18.7	8.0	2.2	4.7	35.9
Malaysia (2019)	10.3	17.2	17.8	4.4	8.5	58.2
Myanmar (2017)	1.8	15.9	10.8	4.7	5.5	38.7
Philippines (2019)	4.6	20.3	8.5	8.5	10.1	51.9
Singapore (2019)	6.0	16.3	9.8	9.4	4.5	46.0
Thailand (2019)	7.3	16.1	16.3	3.4	5.4	48.5
Viet Nam (2018)	5.1	13.5	17.9	3.3	7.9	47.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>49.1</b>

## Unemployment

There will likely be higher unemployment across ASEAN Member States for the medium-term, with particular sectors, such as tourism, potentially impacted for the long-term, but opportunities may also arise in new sectors.

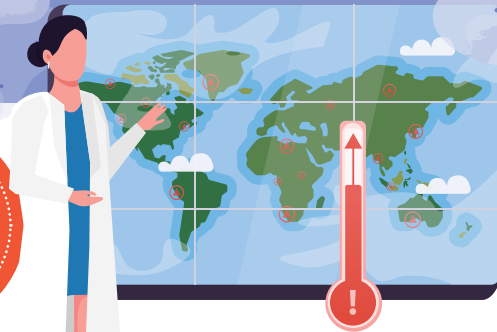


Read the ASEAN Rapid Assessment at: [https://asean.org/storage/ASEAN-Rapid-Assessment\\_Final-23112020.pdf](https://asean.org/storage/ASEAN-Rapid-Assessment_Final-23112020.pdf)

Sources: Labour Force Survey Reports of different AMS except for Singapore. For Singapore source data are administrative records and Labour Force Survey, Manpower Research and Statistics Department, Ministry of Manpower



# Global Temperature Check



## The top 3 warmest years on record

2020 was one of the three warmest years on record, almost at par with 2016, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Provisional Report on the State of the Global Climate 2020.



**Analysis from the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) says it is a tie between 2016 and 2020**

## 2020 CO2 emissions

Preliminary estimates indicate a reduction in the annual global emission between 4.2% and 7.5%. This is not enough to bring down atmospheric CO2. (WMO)



1.2°C

The global mean temperature for 2020 (January to October) was  $1.2 \pm 0.1^\circ\text{C}$  above the 1850–1900 pre-industrial period.

2°C

In the legally-binding Paris Agreement of 2015, nations agreed to limit the global temperature rise to not more than  $2^\circ\text{C}$  above pre-industrial levels and cut greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

1.5°C

To prevent warming beyond  $1.5^\circ\text{C}$ , the world needs to cut emissions by 7.6% every year.

“The COVID-19 crisis offers only a short-term reduction in global emissions and will not contribute significantly to emissions reductions by 2030 unless countries pursue an economic recovery that incorporates strong decarbonisation.” (UNEP)

## Climate and water resources

The United Nations World Water Development Report (UNESCO, 2019) lists three key water related impacts of a changing climate:

1. Increases in water-related disasters
2. Increases in areas suffering from water stress
3. Increases in poor water quality-related fatalities. Currently, 90% of the impact of natural disasters is water-related.



By 2050, the number of people at risk of floods will increase from its current level of 1.2 billion to 1.6 billion.

In the early to mid-2010s, 1.9 billion people lived in potential severely water-scarce areas.

In 2050, this number will increase between 2.7 to 3.2 billion people. As of 2019, 12% of the world population drinks water from unimproved and unsafe sources.

More than 30% of the world population, or 2.4 billion people, live without any form of sanitation.

**Global tropical cyclones in 2020 tied a record:** A total of 103 named storms occurred around the world in 2020, tying the record number seen in 2018. (NOAA)

## WATER-RELATED DISASTERS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

December 2020

Powerful cyclones hit the Philippines, Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, killing hundreds and displacing millions.

January 2021

The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) has reported 102 disasters from 28 December 2020 to 24 January 2021. Most of the recorded disasters were flooding and landslides in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia.

## Environment

# Significant Achievements in Environmental Cooperation in ASEAN



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**The year 2020 has been a year of unprecedented events, brought on by the spread of COVID-19 across the world. The pandemic has significant impacts not only on public health and economic growth but also on the environment.**

**I**t magnifies the existing threats of plastics waste and marine debris. It has forced the postponement of the global discourse on climate change, biodiversity, and other environmental issues to 2021.

ASEAN adapted quickly to these challenges and persevered in advancing cooperation on environmental protection and conservation. Among others, these are in the areas of marine debris pollution, climate change, and biodiversity conservation and other initiatives that will contribute to the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

### Combating Marine Debris

ASEAN has some of the longest coastlines, most beautiful beaches, and the richest ocean resources that provide vital goods and ecosystem services such as food, water, medicine, and climate regulation. For ASEAN, ocean-based industries serve as important economic development drivers, representing critical sources of employment and income, especially for coastal communities. However, the oceans and coasts are cumulatively under immense pressure and threats in the region and globally, not only from overfishing, coastal development, and climate change, but also from the pressing issue of marine debris pollution.

Recognising the transboundary nature of the issue and the need for coordinated action, ASEAN under the leadership of Thailand adopted the **Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in ASEAN Region** and the **ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris** in 2019 and is currently finalising an ASEAN Regional Action Plan on Marine Debris to operationalise the Declaration and the Framework. The Regional Action Plan will serve as a critical roadmap for ASEAN to move forward in a collective and coordinated manner to fight against marine debris over the next five years.

In preparation for the Regional Action Plan implementation, several groundwork initiatives have been well in progress this year to contribute to creating enabling conditions. These include support to local capacity building, scaling-up model practices and policies on solid waste management to minimise leakage to the ocean, and national action plans for reducing plastic pollution in ASEAN countries. ASEAN also continues to exchange experiences and identify shared solutions to address the magnified threats of marine plastic debris in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region.

Addressing the marine debris issue holistically will require a transformational shift to sustainable consumption and production patterns as well as circular economy approach. To this end, ASEAN is conducting a feasibility study on establishment of an ASEAN Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform and ASEAN Sustainable Consumption and Production Framework, which would promote knowledge-sharing and dialogue among policymakers, the business community, and civil society in ASEAN on opportunities and obstacles to a shift to more circular practices. It is now more critical than ever for all ASEAN citizens, as consumers, businesses, and responsible members of society, to be involved and take an active part in the implementation of ASEAN's efforts in combating marine debris. Post-COVID-19 recovery will be an opportunity to transform the way we live and conduct business to cope with future risks and strengthen resilience.

### Advancing Climate Action

As a region with long and heavily populated coastlines and a heavy reliance on agriculture for livelihood, especially for a large segment of the population living below the poverty line, ASEAN is among the world's most vulnerable regions. ASEAN has witnessed the global impacts of climate change, from water shortages and drought to floods and tropical cyclones. For societies most vulnerable to climate change, the current COVID-19 pandemic only magnifies their vulnerabilities. Strengthening adaptation and resilience is, therefore, among ASEAN's priorities. The ASEAN Leaders recently adopted the **ASEAN Declaration on the Strengthening of Adaptation to Drought** at the 37th ASEAN Summit last year, to promote a longer-term, holistic, and more strategic approach, including a regional framework to strengthen adaptation to drought.

As a fast-growing region, ASEAN sees significant progress and urbanisation and the increasing demand for raw materials from land, water, forests, and energy and transport. As part of ASEAN's commitment





Photo Credit: © Daniel M. Ocampo - Shelter, Zooming in on Biodiversity 2019 Grand Prize winner, ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity

to low carbon development, ASEAN takes the lead in several climate initiatives, such as convening the **Special ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Climate Action**, and developing ASEAN joint statements on climate change, and support to national actions. However, more action is needed to enhance our efforts, including transformative change to achieve nationally determined contributions or NDCs. Initiatives are underway to support the ASEAN Member States in developing long-term low-GHG-emission development strategies.

Despite the delay of the global climate talks last year, our responsibility to contribute to climate action for our future generations, our region, and our planet remains. Just as businesses learned to adapt their operations to the new norm during this pandemic situation, individuals must also collectively move forward in climate action by, among others, making use of technology and 4IR opportunities to complement existing efforts.

### **Mainstreaming Biodiversity Considerations into Development and COVID-19 Recovery Process**

ASEAN is home to rich biodiversity that provides significant natural capital and ecosystem services to support people's well-being and livelihoods, and economic growth. However, the region has experienced a biodiversity decline over the years. The decline of species, coupled with increasing proximity between humans and wildlife through expanding human activities into their natural habitats, could trigger the spillover of pathogens from animals

to humans, causing zoonotic diseases, also known as zoonoses like COVID-19. Zoonoses have caused two-thirds of known human infectious diseases and 75 per cent of the new and emerging ones. More than 70 per cent of the diseases are associated with wild animals. Other studies suggest that 90 per cent of zoonotic diseases came from wildlife.

ASEAN established the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) to support ASEAN countries in preventing further biodiversity loss and promoting sustainable use of biodiversity resources. Considering the complex links between biodiversity and human health, mainstreaming biodiversity considerations into development and the **ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework** has been identified as the primary focus for ASEAN to move forward its biodiversity conservation efforts. Participation of youth in ASEAN as a catalyst for regional sustainability was also continued to be sought by ASEAN, evident by the successful conduct of youth-led webinar series on ASEAN Youth and COVID-19 this year.

ASEAN will continue to advance its initiatives on biodiversity conservation by, among others, expanding the existing flagship ASEAN Heritage Programme, and strengthening research and policies on zoonotic diseases and biodiversity conservation to prevent future risks of zoonotic pandemics.

### **Building Partnerships**

Our planet and its resources belong to global citizens, so everyone's action and contribution to building a better future for ASEAN are critical. The progress that ASEAN has made so far would not be possible without a strong partnership with ASEAN dialogue and development partners and various stakeholders. Last year, ASEAN had constructive dialogues and fruitful cooperation with partners on a wide range of environmental issues. ASEAN looks forward to a continued and strengthened partnership with dialogue and development partners, international organisations, financial institutions, industry and private sector, academia, and civil society to build back better.

### **Gearing Up Towards 2021**

The year 2021 will be the year of renewed commitments as ASEAN reflected on the achievements and lessons learned from the mid-term implementation of the ASEAN Community Blueprints 2025. This year, many ongoing initiatives will inform and lay the groundwork for ASEAN's direction towards achieving the ASEAN Community Vision.

The ongoing crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly presents an enormous challenge yet tremendous opportunities to build back better through green recovery. The 37th ASEAN Summit in 2020 has adopted the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, which reflects ASEAN's optimism and ability to take advantage of the situation to find innovative ways to address the needs of the people further. Embedded as one of the recovery plan's broad strategies is to advance towards a more sustainable and resilient future.

Brunei Darussalam's ASEAN Chairmanship for 2021 with the theme "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper" will continue to accelerate efforts to recover from the pandemic and realise the ambitions of an ASEAN Community. To this end, the support and contribution of dialogue and development partners, as well as various stakeholders, are essential to help shape the regional outlook and ASEAN's post-2025 Vision. In the spirit of ASEAN, we will continue to join hands and act for ASEAN's better future. ■



Environment

# Towards a Haze-Free ASEAN

## Strengthening Regional Collaborative Action in Addressing Transboundary Haze Pollution



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**The ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Pollution (AATHP), signed by the ASEAN Member States in 2002, is a global model and the first regional arrangement in the world. The AATHP has played a crucial role as a primary driver of ASEAN to tackle the haze challenges in the region jointly.**

The agreement comprehensively addresses all aspects of fire and haze, including prevention, emphasising the underlying causes, monitoring, and mitigation. The ASEAN Member States have made substantial progress in carrying out the agreement and its strategies, through partnerships, sharing of experiences, information, responsibilities and benefits, and working towards the common good. The agreement is under the Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation. Its initiatives include the development and operationalisation of the regional standard operating procedures (SOP) that guide monitoring and assessment efforts and joint emergency response, capacity building, training programmes, and on-the-ground activities to promote rehabilitation and sustainable use of peatlands through the development and implementation of the ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS).





The most significant management issue of regional importance is the transboundary haze pollution arising from peatland fires. The ASEAN region contains over half of the world's peatlands, a valuable ecosystem critical for preserving global biodiversity and storing carbon. However, peat soils, which are rich in organic matter, are vulnerable to fires. These fires create toxic smoke that covers large areas of the region, poses serious health hazards, and emits tons of greenhouse gases.

In 2015 and 2019, the region experienced prolonged drier-than-normal conditions due to climate change and El Niño effects, which led to the significant increase of hotspot activities, deterioration of air quality, and widespread haze pollution over many parts of the ASEAN region. The ASEAN ministers in charge of transboundary haze pollution expressed concerns over the severity and geographical spread of the haze affecting various ASEAN countries.

Although solutions and effective mechanisms have been tried and tested over the years, there are still continuous challenges to overcome before the region can declare itself as a haze-free region.

The problem of transboundary haze pollution has yet to be brought under systematic control for effective implementation. There is also a need to strengthen policies and practices at the national and local government levels to address the root causes of haze pollution, to enhance planning, prevention, and preparedness efforts prior to the start of the dry season. Furthermore, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has brought a higher risk of spreading wildfires as governments are shifting financial and human resources towards COVID-19 responses, limiting the ability to respond to fire events and undertake prevention measures. While not documented publicly yet, firefighting budgets have likely been impacted according to some reports (COVID-19 Hampers Indonesia's Fight against Forest Fires as Haze Season Looms, N. Rayda, 2020).

Finding solutions to the haze problem requires a concerted effort from multiple parties and a large amount of financing. It is important to note that while inter-governmental cooperation is essential, a government is unable to address this challenge alone. Operationalisation of a regional multi-stakeholder platform

for building capacity, harmonising programmes and projects, coordinating activities of stakeholders, and channelling multiple sources of finance are vital to addressing the transboundary haze challenge.

Confronting the challenges on two fronts, from the community and regional coordination, is viewed to expedite the change needed to free the region from transboundary haze events in the future. The regional multi-stakeholder platform will promote best practices, improve fire and haze prevention, and support evidence-based policy dialogue, drawing on data collected through a harmonised data management system that extends from local to regional. The community behaviour change and shift in practice will lower the risk of fire occurrences resulting in the drop of transboundary haze events.

The final reviews of the roadmap and APMS in 2020 have further highlighted the importance of enhanced cooperation among ASEAN Member States. Collective efforts have built local community support and sustained traditional



**There is also a need to strengthen policies and practices at the national and local government levels to address the root causes of haze pollution, to enhance planning, prevention, and preparedness efforts prior to the start of the dry season.**







**Supporting national and regional actions on haze reduction will require planned investments and contributions estimated at 1.5 billion US dollars over the next 10 years.**

livelihood options, and promoted the region's benefits by reducing the risk of fire and associated haze. However, the reviews also emphasised that more work is needed to scale-up community engagement and develop clear national mechanisms for community empowerment and the recognition of indigenous peoples and local communities' rights.

All these efforts come at a cost. Supporting national and regional actions on haze reduction will require planned investments and contributions estimated at 1.5 billion US dollars over the next 10 years.

The roadmap and APMS, together with the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 and priority actions identified in National Action Plans on Peatlands (NAPPs), serve as the basis for developing an investment framework. A 10-year investment mechanism will allow for predictable funding flows and potential for the joint programme, help aggregate financing, and reduce transaction costs. The investment framework will include the public, private, development cooperation, environmental, and philanthropic financing required to fund anti-haze programmes and projects.

The regional coordination platform, renewed strategies, action plans, and the 10-year investment framework will contribute to increased financing flows to combat haze at all levels and promote fire-free farming, sustainable management, and peatland conservation best practices.

ASEAN Member States shall drive the implementation of the AATHP with support from the ASEAN Secretariat. However, an effective collaborative partnership is equally important.

It is time to step up our efforts, improve and strengthen partnerships with Dialogue and Development Partners, international organisations, private sector, and civil society organisations to support the ASEAN Member States and communities through cross-sectoral collaboration and multi-stakeholder engagement. With collective resolve, ASEAN will go a long way to enhance the sustainable management of the environment, a haze-free region, and improve our next generations' quality of life. ■



## Biodiversity and Climate Change

# Treating Nature Better

## Lessons from 2020



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**The year 2020 was supposed to be the environment’s “super year,” as named by the UN Environment Programme (United Nations Environment Programme 2020: A Crunch Year for the Biodiversity and Climate Emergencies, 2019). This milestone was set way before there was any indication of a virus that would cause a global pandemic.**

There were high hopes that 2020 will be pivotal for biodiversity, with the numerous international dialogues and landmark agreements set to happen within the year, including the negotiations of the 196 Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, however, and the numerous climate-related hazards have shocked the ASEAN region with impacts that have been felt across all aspects of our lives, causing scores of deaths and millions in material losses.

Looking back at the year that was, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) lists a number of lessons that we gleaned from 2020 and will serve as our guide as we take the path towards recovery and the 2050 vision of living in harmony with nature.

### **Lesson 1: Concerted efforts in protecting biodiversity can prevent the emergence of more pandemics**

To date, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected 78 million people globally, which resulted in a death toll of close to 1.7 million. While the initial blame was placed on natural virus reservoirs such as bats and pangolins, the global public health crisis raised public awareness about the intricate link between biodiversity loss and pandemics. The recent workshop report on biodiversity and pandemics released by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) underscored human activities as the root causes of pandemics and further warned that more diseases will emerge, cause more deaths, and result in further

economic losses. Additionally, the IPBES report stated: “There are fundamental knowledge gaps on the linkages among biodiversity, anthropogenic environmental changes, and pandemic risk that will be critical to enacting policy changes to prevent pandemics.” As such, the conduct of further research on the connections between the environment and animal-borne diseases will guide various sectors, including policymakers, on the proper actions to avert another virus-caused pandemic.

The cost of reducing the risk to prevent pandemics is much less than the price of responding to a health crisis. Therefore, investments in conserving wildlife species and ensuring environmental integrity should be considered essential in protecting human well-being.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity used the momentum to engage relevant sectoral bodies to integrate biodiversity into the response to COVID-19 and prevention of future pandemics. Discussions were held through a series of webinars such as “Biodiversity and Preventing Future Pandemics” in May 2020 and “Wildlife Conservation and Zoonotic Diseases: Halting Species Loss and Tackling Public Health in the ASEAN” in November 2020, and the four-part interactive webinar series on ASEAN Youth and COVID-19, to name a few.

In conjunction with the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, the ASEAN, through the ASEAN Green Initiative, aims to promote the restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystem resources.



## ASEAN envisions adopting nature-based solutions to combat desertification, halt biodiversity loss, and reverse land degradation through the planting of 10 million trees in the region in 10 years, beginning in 2021.

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### Lesson 2: The best time to turn to biodiversity for climate action is now

While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt the world, climate emergencies have also devastated ASEAN this year with more intense and frequent typhoons and floods, wreaking havoc on lives and properties.

The ACB has initiated region-wide discussions to promote ecosystem-based adaptation strategies, recognising that biodiversity is at the core of nature-based solutions.

In December 2020, the ACB co-organised the webinar on “Biodiversity and Building Resilience to the Impacts of Climate Change in the ASEAN,” with support from SwedBio. The experts in the webinar shared that while climate change is one of the main culprits that drive the loss of nature, the main paradox is that biodiversity and its ecosystem services underpin our principal solutions and efforts to tackle climate change and its impacts. Without healthy biodiversity, our fight against climate change would be an impossible feat.

Aichi Biodiversity Target 11, which aims to conserve at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water and at least 10 per cent marine and coastal areas, is one of the on-track biodiversity targets for the region. As of June 2020, ASEAN’s terrestrial area coverage is at 13.25 per cent while marine area coverage is at 3.43 per cent, thereby contributing to the total global coverage, estimated at seven per cent for marine areas and 15 per cent for terrestrial areas.

The ACB, as the Secretariat of the ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHP) Programme, has been drumming up support for the region’s cream of the crop of protected areas. The AHP programme offers opportunities to strengthen regional connectivity and cooperation, as ecosystems and their services transcend national borders. The EU-ASEAN project, Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN, aims to improve the protection and management of key biodiversity areas, including AHPs, by providing support at the site, national, and regional levels.

In light of the current crises ASEAN is facing, nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches are steadily gaining prominence. For a region that is rich in natural heritage and highly vulnerable to natural hazards, adopting these “no regret” solutions will effectively manage our protected areas. Thus, it becomes more crucial for ASEAN to intensify regional and cross-sectoral cooperation. During one of the **Third ASEAN Conference on Biodiversity** virtual sessions, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Kung Phoak emphasised that “these crises should be seen as opportunities to explore ways and leverage existing partnership and initiatives toward a more collective and coordinated response to mitigate impacts.”

### Lesson 3: The road to building a better normal entails integrating biodiversity considerations across all levels and sectors

Against the pressing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and biodiversity loss, the crucial work of the ACB as an intergovernmental body mandated by the ASEAN Member States to facilitate joint programmes on biodiversity in the region becomes more pronounced and urgent. The recent turn of events intensified

the need to mainstream biodiversity into public and private decision-making processes as it becomes more apparent that protecting biodiversity is a cross-sectoral concern.

Mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors starts with communicating the need to see biodiversity and its conservation as a viable investment. ASEAN has supported this initiative in its joint statements during the Fourteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. As a whole, ASEAN agrees to accelerate actions to mainstream biodiversity considerations into relevant national plans, sectors, and cross-sectoral issues.

Despite travel restrictions, the ASEAN Member States and the ACB conducted a series of discussions highlighting the relationship of biodiversity with the interests of various key sectors such as infrastructure, health, agriculture, and business, to name a few.

In October, the ACB and the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources Malaysia organised the Mainstreaming Biodiversity virtual session as part of the **Third ASEAN Conference on Biodiversity**. In this webinar, representatives from the Member States highlighted their biodiversity mainstreaming efforts. Singapore, for example, has been engaging financial institutions to consider environmental, social, and governance criteria in decision-making processes, as well as in developing the green bond market. In Malaysia, biodiversity considerations have been embedded into the country’s land use plan through the National Physical Plan, which includes initiatives and strategies related to biodiversity conservation. In the Philippines, the government has partnered with a renewable energy company for the conservation of priority threatened species. Thailand likewise shared that biodiversity awareness has been incorporated into its education curriculum.

Another webinar titled “Investing in Sustainable Green Infrastructure,” which was co-organised by the ACB and the Biodiversity Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines and supported by the European Union, has contributed to this ongoing discussion.





Within ASEAN, there is a growing recognition of the contribution of nature conservation to socio-economic growth. In this regard, the ACB facilitates ASEAN's regional support to integrate biodiversity into various sectoral frameworks at the regional and national levels. As part of our thrust to mainstream biodiversity, the ACB has been ramping up efforts to lay the groundwork so that biodiversity considerations are factored into the plans, strategies, and actions of all economic sectors. This preconditions the rest of what we do.

### The Way Forward for Biodiversity in ASEAN

Now more than ever, the world is experiencing the grave impacts of biodiversity loss on human health,

economy, the climate, and our general way of life—and all these, in one way or another, stemmed from the unsustainable use and mismanagement of our natural capital. Thus, the hard lessons we have learned from 2020 call us to reflect on how we can live in harmony with nature.

As the region charts a path to building back better, it recognises that addressing the concurrent crises requires concerted actions based on a long-term socio-economic recovery strategy. Through the **ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework**, the region has put in place a blueprint for broad recovery strategies and measures in line with sectoral and regional priorities. In its steadfast commitment to promote sustainable

development in all dimensions, Broad Strategy 5: Advancing Towards a More Sustainable and Resilient Future of the framework further emphasises the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration and multi-stakeholder engagement towards ASEAN's agenda on mainstreaming biodiversity across relevant sectors.

While the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccines may speed up recovery and jumpstart economies, immunisation is just part of the solutions to sail through the "era of pandemics." It is critical that the crises we are facing are viewed not as isolated incidents but part of the bigger challenge requiring medium and long term actions, of which biodiversity must be a key component. ■



*The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, established in 2005, is ASEAN's response to the challenge of biodiversity loss. It is an intergovernmental organisation that facilitates cooperation and coordination among the 10 ASEAN Member States and with regional and international organisations on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of such natural treasures. For more information about the Centre and its activities, please visit: <https://aseanbiodiversity.org/>.*

*The ACB is managed by a Governing Board (GB), which is composed of the ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment (ASOEN) and the Secretary-General of ASEAN. The GB, which is headed by the ASOEN Chairperson, has the overall responsibility and accountability on the operations of ACB. The ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (AWGNCB), on the other hand, provides technical guidance to ACB by recommending key areas of focus for its work. The AWGNCB members also serve as ACB's National Contact Points in their respective countries. The ACB, in close coordination with the ASEAN Secretariat, initiates and implements programmes and projects along biodiversity conservation.*



Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance

# FORGING AHEAD

## THE NEW AADMER PROGRAMME FOR 2021-2025



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**The ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) reflects the ASEAN Member States' strong commitment to reduce disaster losses and respond to emergencies in the region in a collaborative manner.**

**S**igned by the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN in Vientiane, Lao PDR in July 2005, the agreement captures the individual and collective experience of ASEAN Member States in responding to disasters. The agreement was implemented in two 5-year AADMER Work Programme (AWP) cycles: AWP 2010-2015 and 2016-2020.

### **AWP 2021-2025**

The new AWP 2021-2025 was adopted at the **8th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management (AMMDM)** held on 27 November 2020. The AWP 2021-2025 highlights the whole-of-society approach, charting a comprehensive direction for concerted ASEAN cooperation with other ASEAN mechanisms and international actors in the areas of disaster management, emergency response, and humanitarian assistance. The AWP 2021-2025 also emphasises disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation to address current gaps and challenges from the previous work programme.

The 2021-2025 Work Programme sets an example for the continuous ASEAN alignment with the regional agreements such as the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, ASEAN Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society, as well as the new ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening of Adaptation on Drought and ASEAN



Guidelines on Disaster Social Protection to Increase Resilience. Moreover, the work programme aligns with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) key provisions and its seven targets while maintaining the ASEAN identity and pursuing the goals set by the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM). The following principles guide the AWP: (i) institutionalisation, localisation and communication, (ii) finance and resource mobilisation, (iii) gender and social inclusion, (iv) multi-hazards approach, (v) innovation, (vi) partnership, and (vii) synergy.

In the next five years, the AADMER will be carried out through five priority programmes that reflect its significant provisions. These priority programmes are (i) risk assessment and monitoring; (ii) prevention and mitigation; (iii) preparedness and response; (iv) resilient recovery; and (v) global leadership.

The three ACDM working groups will oversee the implementation of the 15 sub-priorities, 30 outcomes, and 117 outputs that were developed to cover strategic areas that will be pursued under all priority programmes. These are the working groups on Prevention and Mitigation; Preparedness, Response and Recovery; and Global Leadership. The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) continues its role of facilitating cooperation and coordination among the ASEAN Member States to fulfil a wider range of functions covering the whole spectrum of disaster management, as mandated by AADMER, given available resources.

### Web-based Monitoring and Evaluation System

The AADMER Work Programme 2021-2025 also adopts a web-based monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system that will allow the ACDM to systematically monitor progress and help achieve results. Furthermore, the web-based system will facilitate the generation and collection of reliable monitoring data to inform the strategies and approaches for implementing the work programme. The improved M&E system will allow the ACDM to intervene and conduct more informed decision-making and planning, while the lessons learned will contribute to future programme development.

### The Role of AMMDM and ACDM in the AWP 2021-2025 Implementation

In the next five years, the AMMDM will continue to fulfil its mandate to promote synergy of efforts with other ASEAN ministerial bodies to accelerate a well-coordinated, more robust, and faster ASEAN's collective response to disasters. The AMMDM will also ensure continued progress in the development of disaster-resilient and safer communities to reduce disaster losses in the region, using AADMER as the regional policy backbone and common platform to maintain ASEAN's Centrality.

The ACDM, meanwhile, will continue to fulfil its function as the prime mover of AADMER. Further, it will formulate and implement programmes, projects, and activities to enhance regional cooperation in all aspects of disaster management through mutual supports and activities. These are targeted to minimise the adverse consequences of disasters on ASEAN



countries' economic and social development. Singapore as AMMDM/ACDM Chair for 2021 will lead the first year of implementation with 67 outputs. The ASEAN Senior Executive Programme on Disaster Management, ASEAN Strategic Policy Dialogue on Disaster Management, and ASEAN Mapping Exercises are the three key activities of the Chair this 2021.

In addition to the above, the AADMER Work Programme's implementation will be anchored on strengthening the relationship with ACDM Partners, including relevant dialogue partners, relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies, regional and international agencies, community-based organisations, NGOs, private sector, and individuals. New partners from the private sector, academia, think tanks, media, and faith-based organisations will be engaged as well. The ACDM and ASEAN Secretariat acknowledge the support provided by the Asian Development Bank, the Government of Canada, the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund, and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction in the development of the AWP 2021-2025. ■



**For more information on the AADMER, please visit:**  
<https://asean.org/storage/AADMER-Work-Programme-2021-2025.pdf>.

**The Disaster Management and Disaster Assistance (DMHA) Division of the ASEAN Secretariat may be reached at [dmha-div@asean.org](mailto:dmha-div@asean.org).**

## Culture and Information

# Towards a Robust and Resilient Cultural Sector



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### SECTORAL ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2020

#### Adopting Digital Culture

The culture sector launched the **ASEAN Cultural Heritage Digital Archive (ACHDA)** portal in February 2020. The site stores and showcases the 3D images of over 160 cultural artefacts from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, the three participating Member States in the first phase of the ACHDA project.

The portal provides visitors a virtual cultural journey, a timely initiative that promotes greater inclusiveness and accessibility of culture to the people of ASEAN. At the same time, it serves as an important conduit for promotion and perseverance of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the region.

To capitalise on the available digital technology, the culture sector is proceeding with the second phase that entails the 360 Virtual Reality and 4K capture of the UNESCO cultural heritage sites of ASEAN Member States. Immersive experiences of the Angkor Wat, Borobudur Temple, and Bagan can now be enjoyed at the ASEAN Culture House in Busan, South Korea. More cultural sites of ASEAN will be showcased in the future.

#### Fostering ASEAN Identity

To foster ASEAN Identity and awareness, the culture sector has led to the development of the Narrative of ASEAN Identity. The narrative espouses the region's shared values that are transmitted to the ASEAN people from generation to generation as well the institutional values

*Indonesia's Panji Jayakusuma script is a 734-page story about the adventures of Raden Panji as he searched for his lost lover [part of the ACHDA collection]*







*Thailand's manuscript cabinet on pig-legged stand depicts scenes from the Ramayana, celestial being, animals, mythical animals, flame like foliate scrolls, and a trellis of flame motifs [part of the ACHDA collection]*

and practices put in place over the past five decades since the founding of ASEAN. Recognising the pivotal role of ASEAN Identity in community building, the ASEAN Leaders adopted this narrative at the 37th ASEAN Summit in November 2020.

### Fighting Fake News

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, fake news has been surging through cyberspace, spanning from claims of preventive remedies and bogus cures to misinformation that downplays the risks of the disease. If left unchecked, the proliferation of fake news and misinformation creates a climate of distrust, intolerance, fear, and discrimination. In response, the information sector issued a **Joint Statement to Minimise the Negative Effects of COVID-19**. The joint statement issued by

the ministers responsible for information reiterated ASEAN's commitment to address the proliferation of fake news and misinformation and underscored the important roles of the media, society and individuals in transmitting timely and accurate information.

### SECTORAL PRIORITIES FOR 2021 Promoting Cultural and Creative Digital Economy

Recognising the digital and cultural convergence we are witnessing today; the culture sector is further enhancing regional cooperation in promoting and developing small and medium creative and cultural enterprises (SMCEs). To this end, the culture sector is planning to convene a regional discussion on the digital creative economy to better coordinate and leverage ASEAN mechanisms to develop an inter-pillar, cross-sectoral



**Recognising the pivotal role of ASEAN Identity in community building, the ASEAN Leaders adopted this narrative at the 37th ASEAN Summit in November 2020.**

approach towards building a vibrant and robust ecosystem for SMCEs to thrive. The ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF), adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 37th ASEAN Summit, has also identified the digital creative economy as a potential contributor to the region's economic recovery.

### **Deepening Partnerships in Culture, Arts, and Films**

With the culture and information sectors playing pivotal roles in building a vibrant and cohesive ASEAN community, both sectors are deepening partnerships with the dialogue partners. Both sectors will be convening various discussions with the dialogue partners in several areas, including film development and

organisations, promotion of cultural heritage, and the development of visual arts. Both sectors will also contribute towards the regional discussion to foster greater understanding, tolerance, and regional agendas among ASEAN peoples. The deliberations are expected to culminate with a strategic framework to support Brunei Darussalam's Chairmanship of ASEAN with its theme on "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper" in 2021.

### **Building ASEAN Awareness**

In ongoing efforts to promote ASEAN as a Community of Opportunities for All, the information sector will launch various high impact and engaging communication offerings. These digital offerings include a new series of podcasts, "ASEAN Champions,"

where ASEAN citizens can share their inspirations and hopes for the region. In the pipeline, too, are a series of webtoons and animations to turn the spotlight on ASEAN developments and ASEAN 101 videos that aim to better inform ASEAN citizens on what ASEAN stands for, its achievements, and priorities.

To build greater inclusiveness and deepen the sense of regional belonging and community-building, the information sector will also be driving efforts to ensure that information is accessible to all. To this end, the sector will discuss ways to better promote information accessibility for all, especially in digital broadcasting, and to encourage digital readiness among the people of ASEAN. ■

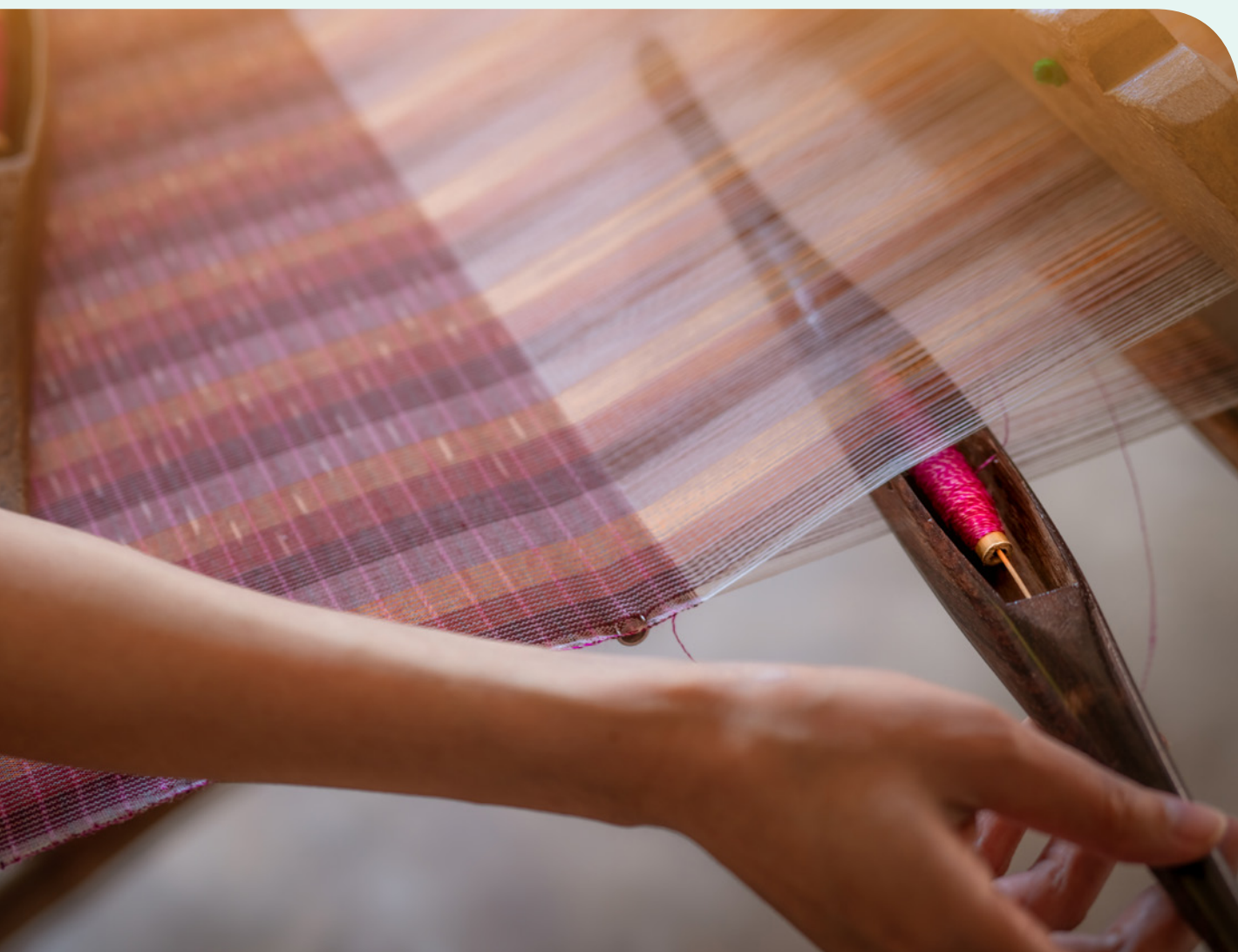


Photo Credit: © Fahroni/Shutterstock



*Shifting  
Currents*

# DEFENCE COOPERATION IN ASEAN

## Steadfast Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic



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**Since its founding, ASEAN's most tangible achievement has been the preservation of peace and stability that is bolstered by a strong sense of goodwill and enduring cooperation among the region's defence establishments.**

**E**stablished against the backdrop of the Cold War, ASEAN has navigated the ebbs and flows of regional and global politics by expanding and deepening cooperation among its Member States. Over the past five decades, ASEAN militaries have been called upon to undertake more demanding and complex missions, including venturing into the domain of non-traditional security issues.

One of these is the ASEAN militaries' role and in managing the COVID-19 pandemic response. The contributions in national and regional efforts demonstrate the agility and adaptivity of defence establishments to new and emerging challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic response would require a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to harness all available resources to combat the most potent threat to humanity in our lifetime. However, in the early days of the pandemic, this necessity was not entirely evident. The defence establishment grasped the seriousness of the COVID-19 virus and was among the first sectoral body to respond to the crisis. It issued the [Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defence Ministers on Defence Cooperation Against Disease Outbreaks](#) on 19 February 2020 to underscore the commitment to mobilise the defence sector's resources in coping with the pandemic.

Following the Ministers' Statement, the ASEAN Center of Military Medicine (ACMM) conducted a Table Top Exercise in May 2020 and followed this up with a virtual workshop to develop the ACMM Guidelines on COVID-19 Quarantine Camp in August 2020. The Network of ASEAN Chemical, Biological, and Radiological Defence Experts convened a workshop in





June 2020 that focused on laboratory diagnostic methodologies and research on COVID-19 and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)-CoV-2 virus. In the larger ASEAN context, the defence sector also resolves to implement the **ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework**, particularly in the areas of public health and disaster management.

In the domestic setting, ASEAN Member States militaries are an integral part of the whole-of-government approach. Given the streamlined organisational structure and available resources, defence establishments have been deployed to either lead or support Member States' work in fighting COVID-19. They provide a wide range of assistance: enhancing tracing, testing, treatment, and quarantine capacities; providing logistical services, improving the security of entry/exit points, and helping to enforce movement control and lockdown orders. The militaries were also involved in facilitating the delivery of aid under bilateral arrangements.

In addition to their involvement in national efforts, some Member States also assisted their regional counterparts during these trying times. The Armed Forces of the Philippines helped Viet Nam in transporting its stranded citizens from several parts of the Philippines to Hanoi. The Royal Thai Army collaborated with the ACMM to modify mobile negative air pressure cabinets for delivery to interested Member States.

Despite the disruption brought about by the pandemic, 2020 was a successful year for the defence sector, with the excellent chairmanship of Viet Nam and

## **The year 2020 was a special year for defence cooperation in ASEAN, especially with its Dialogue Partners, as it marked the 10th anniversary of the founding of the ADMM-Plus.**

the continued support from the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) partners. Apart from the regular working groups, senior officials and ministerial level meetings, a special session of the senior officials meeting to discuss defence cooperation in the time of COVID-19 was also convened on 15 May 2020. The 14th ADMM and the 7th ADMM-Plus were held on 9 and 10 December 2020, respectively. The year 2020 was also a significant milestone as both the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus charted the direction of its cooperation in the next three years through the adoption of the ADMM Three-Year Work Programme 2020-2022 and the Work Plans for the seven ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups for the 2021-2023 cycle.

In addition, the 14th ADMM initiated a number of key deliverables tailored to the COVID-19 pandemic response. In the area of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, the Ministers adopted the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of the ASEAN Militaries Ready Group (AMRG) on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. This group—which is coordinated by the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre)—

prepares a military team for quick deployment to crisis areas in a coordinated manner under the ASEAN banner. It can offer support in such areas as search and rescue, emergency medical aid, distribution of goods, along with transportation and evacuations. The AMRG on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operates through all phases of the crisis namely, disaster preparedness, pre-deployment, deployment, response, and the transition phase. This SOP, which was finalised after three years of negotiations, will govern the AMRG's scope of assistance, structure and arrangement, the concept of operations, command, control and coordination, logistics and communications, among others.

Beyond COVID-19 responses, the defence establishment also deepened cooperation in several core areas of cooperation. One such area is counter-terrorism, in which the 14th ADMM adopted the SOP of the ASEAN Our Eyes (AOE). The AOE is an initiative to enhance strategic information-sharing on radicalisation, violent extremism, and terrorism among defence establishments in the region. This initiative expands the "Our Eyes" cooperation introduced in late 2017 that initially involved six Member States, namely Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the



Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore. Considering the widespread impact of radicalisation, violent extremism, and terrorism and the interest shown by the remaining four Member States, the “Our Eyes” programme was expanded and brought under the ASEAN framework in 2018.

With respect to peacekeeping, the 14th ADMM adopted the concept paper on the ASEAN Flag to be Displayed Next to the National Flag at the Compound of ASEAN Member State’s Military Units Participating in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. This initiative aims to embed ASEAN’s role and image in the international community, particularly in peacekeeping missions usually deployed outside the ASEAN region. The proposal is also in line with the Leaders’ call to promote and foster ASEAN awareness and identity, among others, through the enhanced display of the ASEAN Flag and the use of the ASEAN Anthem.

To nurture defence interactions, the 14th ADMM adopted two new concept papers. The first concept paper is on developing the linkage between the ADMM and the ASEAN Chiefs of Defence Forces Meeting (ACDFM). Streamlining this important relationship will enable the ADMM to provide policy guidance to the ACDFM on pertinent matters. Conversely, it would also allow the ACDFM to take stock of and consolidate

all ASEAN military meetings for onward reporting to the ADMM.

The second concept paper is on enhancing the defence attaché posts among the Member States. This initiative encourages the active participation of the defence attachés in the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus activities and supports the accreditation process of resident defence attachés in accordance with bilateral agreements between the concerned Member States.

To showcase the excellent work of the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus and to promote understanding on ASEAN defence sector, Viet Nam organised an interface between the ADMM and the Guests of the Chair, namely, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations, on 9 December 2020. Despite the currently limited engagement with the ASEAN defence sector, the Guests highlighted several commonalities: shared values on multilateralism, security concerns, and regional stability interests. This meeting was held as a one-off activity at the discretion of the Chair.

The year 2020 was a special year for defence cooperation in ASEAN, especially with its Dialogue Partners, as it marked the 10th anniversary of the founding of the ADMM-Plus. There was a resounding sentiment that acknowledged the progress of the ADMM-Plus since its inception

in Hanoi in 2010. A commemorative event was organised on 10 December 2020 to mark this milestone, along with the celebratory note that the areas of cooperation in the ADMM-Plus had expanded from five to seven in the past decade and that the frequency of the ADMM-Plus meetings increased from every three years to annual engagements since 2017. The Prime Minister of Viet Nam, the Secretary-General of ASEAN, the UN Under Secretary-General for Field Support, and the Defence Ministers of India and Japan were among those who addressed the anniversary event. In his remarks, the Secretary-General of ASEAN acknowledged that “the ADMM-Plus brings a large pool of resources necessary to address regional security issues of common concern. However, the ADMM-Plus’ inherent diversity also means that participating countries bring along their various and sometimes divergent interests and perspectives to the table. This challenge only serves to underscore the importance of the ADMM-Plus as a platform to bridge differences, and highlights its role in finding common ground to promote and undertake regional cooperation.”

The event was followed by the 7th ADMM-Plus, which saw the adoption of the **Joint Declaration by the ADMM-Plus Defence Ministers on Strategic Security Vision of the ADMM-Plus**, which was only the third instance the ADMM-Plus issued a joint declaration following similar outcomes in 2010 and 2013. Due to the divergent views among the ADMM-Plus participants over “sensitive” issues, the decision was made to issue only joint declarations on important occasions. In lieu of the joint declarations, the ADMM-Plus has issued joint statements on specific topics, when necessary.

The series of meetings in December 2020 also witnessed the handover of chairmanship from Viet Nam to Brunei Darussalam. The incoming chair of the ADMM and ADMM-Plus in 2021 will continue to drive the defence sector’s work under the theme “We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper.” Brunei Darussalam’s key priorities for 2021 are to harness the caring nature of ASEAN, to prepare and adapt for the future, and to create opportunities for the benefit of all. ■



# Conversations

## Reflections: Life in a Pandemic

A year on, people all over the world are still coming to grips with COVID-19's profound impact. Many have lost loved ones, went out of business, or were downsized from jobs. Most had to put their life plans on hold—from

weddings, to studies, to travel and dream vacations. But bright spots have also emerged. Forced to stay-at-home, people became closer to their families, discovered new interests, and developed new skills. *The ASEAN* asked a few ASEAN citizens to share how the pandemic has changed their lives and what they hope for this 2021.

Early this morning, my aunt passed away. She was ill for more than a month and stayed at home. She was afraid to go to the hospital, for fear of tests and results but I believe it was the pandemic that played a major role in her hesitation to go for a check up. So she stayed at home, cared for by her daughter, my cousin. Her intake of food was severely affected and she grew weak by the day, yet she did not want to see a doctor who could make house calls. If she had been given some form of nutrition via intravenous, she may have had a chance. She could have celebrated the Chinese New Year. So today, as I write this, I wish I could cross our state borders to say my last goodbye. But I cannot. I wish I could provide support to my cousin who is making all funeral arrangements alone, but I am unable to do so. Perhaps it is the fear of being exposed to any potential viruses, perhaps I know that if I went, I would give my cousin a big hug, thus going against the obligatory social distancing rule. But most of all, perhaps the fear of bringing the virus back home and exposing my own aged parents has made me unable to bring myself to drive to the nearest police station to apply for a permit to cross the state border. So as I sit writing this, I realise how this pandemic has impacted me in a way I never ever imagined. I remember hoping with all my heart that my aunt would be able to make it because in the back of my mind I wondered how I would say a final goodbye to my only aunt.

Jennifer Tan, PhD  
Lecturer, Malaysia



I planned to move to another company last year but during the pandemic it was harder to find a new one. But I'm grateful that I still have a job during this hard time. For 2021, I really hope people can be more aware of the crisis that we're facing since the pandemic is not over yet. The vaccination programme has been rolled out, but it doesn't mean we're completely safe; we still need to be extra careful with everything.

Mierzanty Ambiasari  
Financial Advisor, Indonesia

COVID-19 has derailed all my vacation plans, including my plan to go to Argentina. Some say the airfares from Malaysia are cheaper, and it's easier to apply for the visa here. The good thing is I can save up more. My wish for 2021 is simple: I can't wait for everything to go back to normal again so I can hang out with my friends like before and go on vacations.

Miertyana Anggiasari  
Market Researcher,  
Indonesian working in Malaysia

The major event is that we have to keep our two kids from school, which comes with keeping them from their friends since March last year and we've become part-time teachers to them. It's really challenging at times. The shift in life for me is that before the pandemic, I've never trusted online orders and delivery. Now, I rarely go to stores. I think I will keep using the click-list or delivery services because I find it very convenient and it's time saving for not being on the road. With the pandemic, I've seen more stress and anxiety. At the same time, it is also encouraging to see how life goes on and how people try their best to help each other out during this difficult time. Our family discovered more songs and music that we would have never been listening to if it was not for the pandemic.

Anouhak P. Baldwin  
Stay-at-home Translator/Consultant, Laotian living in the US



From the Vietnamese experience, the pandemic once again reinvigorates the community spirit when people realise that solidarity, sacrifice, and discipline will help overcome the crisis more effectively. Also, this unprecedented crisis, the long-term consequences of which are still yet to be defined, reminds us of the need to be constantly resilient and open to adjustments.

Hoang Oanh, PhD  
Researcher, Viet Nam





# Yudi Yastika and Riza Jurada

## Former Cruise Ship Staff. Waiting to Wed.

**Indonesian Yudi Yastika and Filipina Riza Jurada first met on a cruise ship, Carnival Miracle, that sailed from Florida in the US to Mexico, Belize, Hawaii, Colombia, and other routes.**

Riza and Yudi had been working on the cruise ship for three years before they finally met. They officially became a couple in August 2019 and it did not take long for them to decide to tie the knot.

The pandemic hit the cruise industry hard, and Riza had to fly home to Manila. Unable to work on board because of an accident, Yudi remained in Bali. Now, travel restrictions are keeping them apart, forcing them to hold off dreams of a wedding this year. ■

I'm in the Philippines now. Yudi was supposed to come to the Philippines last year for me to introduce him to my family and friends because we plan to get married this year. I visited Bali in December 2019 for vacation, and in January 2020, I went back onboard. Then the pandemic happened, there was a global lockdown, so our company decided to send home the crew, and I was repatriated last April.

We will do the traditional Balinese wedding. Even if we can get married in Bali now, I think none of my families and friends will be present because of the situation, so we plan to do a civil wedding in the Philippines afterwards.

A long distance relationship is hard; you don't have any idea until when this pandemic will last. Every time we think of the wedding, we get excited; but we also think about the pandemic that is still here, and it kills the excitement. Sometimes I feel like I'm losing hope, but Yudi is very positive, he keeps on reminding me that there are many couples that are having problems because of this pandemic, lots of couples breaking up, and we need to stay strong, think positive and be optimistic.

The pandemic has a huge impact on our lives and suddenly, our plans and dreams got delayed. We planned to save money for our wedding by working onboard, but it turned out that I could only work for two months, and the pandemic is still here, so we don't have money. I decided to look for a job, and I'm currently working in a corporate world. We want to keep pursuing our dream so that when Indonesia opens again, we're ready.

The vaccines are starting to come out. If it's the only way that I can enter Indonesia, then, of course, I will do it; I will comply with the protocol and policies of each country, including Indonesia, as long as it's the legal way to enter. Any protocols, like getting that vaccines, swab test, quarantine, I can comply with that.

-Riza

We planned to get married this year because my contract with the cruise ship was supposed to finish this year. But last February, I had an accident and broke my leg so I couldn't come back on board. With the pandemic now, we can't realise our dream to get married in Bali, but we're still trying. I'm still looking for a way.

Yes, long-distance relationship is really hard. I haven't seen Riza for over a year now. I always tell her to stay strong, that we will see each other soon, we always talk and support each other. I really love her, and I want to be with her.

I'm managing my family business now, a local radio station and a *warung* (shop) here in Bali. The economy in Bali is not going well because of this pandemic, especially in the tourism industry. Those who are working in tourism are looking for another job. The sales of my *warung* are not too good either; sometimes we get less than before the pandemic. But I will still stay strong to realise our dream.

-Yudi



# Sean Luke Dado

## COVID-19 Survivor

**On 17 July 2020, Sean Luke Dado, his wife Hazel, their two daughters, and grandson fell ill and later tested positive for COVID-19. Another grandson was spared from the disease. In just 14 days, Sean lost his college sweetheart and wife of 29 years.**

*The ASEAN* asked Sean questions about the unimaginable pain and loss COVID-19 caused his family. He chose to reply with a letter he wrote to his wife. Sean posts messages to Hazel on social media, sometimes sharing the mundane, happy events of the day; often talking about how the family tries to cope without her.

Hazel is one of at least 46,000 who have succumbed to COVID-19 in the ASEAN region. Sean agreed to tell his story because he says, "I think it's important to connect faces and stories to all the numbers and statistics, so that people will remain aware that COVID-19 causes real and lasting human suffering." ■

Dear Hazel,

For the past few weeks, I've been following news about the vaccinations happening in many parts of the world. From Ireland to Israel, people in the frontlines against COVID-19, and those most vulnerable to this deadly virus have been given priority to receive the vaccine. It's going to be a long, complicated process to get the vaccine to every corner of the world, but it is still a glimmer of hope in what has been a very grim year.

Here in the Philippines, we're painfully aware of how far we are down the ladder of nations slated to get the vaccine. It's not that our government has been incompetent; just that no nation could possibly have seen a pandemic coming in this 21st century, much less prepare for it. Even the mightiest country in the world, the United States, has recorded the greatest number of casualties brought by this deadly disease.

But we cling to the hope that eventually, the vaccine will reach us all and that I will be able to watch our children and grandchildren be inoculated against this deadly virus. And as much as I look forward to that day, it would also fill me with sadness because, for you, the vaccine has come too late.

Right up to the time we all got sick, with all my heart, I believed we would survive this pandemic. Even during the early days when so much was unknown about COVID-19, we already followed the safety protocols directed by the WHO. We stayed at home as much as possible, wore masks when outside, washed our hands frequently, avoided crowds and social gatherings; we did everything we were supposed to do.

In almost 5 months since the lockdown started, you only left the house once, during the first month, to buy groceries. And yet, COVID-19 found its way into our very home, infecting you, me, our two kids, and our grandson. And by the time COVID left, it had chosen to take you.







COVID separates people and families in the cruelest of ways. My last glimpse of you was when I dropped you off at the ER entrance while I drove to the parking lot. By the time I got back to the ER you were already inside, and I never saw you again. To the end of my days, it will forever weigh heavily in my heart that it was how we parted.

For the next 14 days, you fought bravely against COVID, as did our children and grandson at home. Through the help of so many people, against all odds, we were able to find all the medicine you needed, including blood and plasma. Due to the shortage of supplies caused by the pandemic, finding them was a miracle in itself. But in the end, the doctors couldn't change the fate that was already written for you by God, even before you were born.

As the doctors kindly held up their cellphones to you so we could say our goodbyes through a video call, and I watched you helpless and dying... I couldn't help but question the benevolence of our Almighty God. Yet when your soul went to heaven, and we were faced with our loss, we turned to the same God to dry up our tears.

During the days that followed, every breath I took was a conscious effort. Every thought was a prayer. I and the children had no desire to eat, each of us lost in our own grief. But it was the kindness of relatives and friends who pulled us out of our beds and nursed us back to health. People started sending us food; morning, noon, and night. Even strangers rang our doorbell, leaving fruits and vitamins on the chair that was placed outside our gate. Not wanting the food to go to waste, we began eating again and started getting well.

Now I pray for the day when the world can move forward once more, and this pandemic will be but a harsh part of our collective memory. But for now, every morning, I force myself to get up, painfully aware that I live in a world which no longer includes you. Like millions of other people, there is a void in my heart that can never be filled. But life has to go on, even though it is no longer complete.

Someday this pandemic will end. And when it does, I picture families emerging from their homes and into the sunshine, complete and untouched.

I miss you, Hazel. wish you were here.

Love,  
Sean



# Snapshots

## ASEAN PRIZE HONOURS THE REGION'S OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS



**NOVIA D. RULISTIA**  
Staff Writer, *The ASEAN*

**Outstanding ASEAN citizens and organisations that have gone the extra mile to serve, empower, and advance their communities are gaining well-deserved recognition.**

Launched in 2018, the **ASEAN Prize**, administered by the ASEAN Secretariat, honours individuals and entities that have demonstrated their commitment to improving the lives of ASEAN people while promoting ASEAN's identity and raising awareness on ASEAN.

Lee Yoong Yoong, ASEAN Secretariat's Director for Community Affairs, recalled that "the idea of the ASEAN Prize was first mooted in 2018 during Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN. With sponsorship to do the ASEAN Prize for 10 years from Temasek Foundation, a Singapore-based philanthropic organisation, the aim is for all ASEAN Member States to have an opportunity to present the award to the worthy recipient during their respective Chairmanship of ASEAN."

The nominee must be a citizen of or an organisation registered in any ASEAN Member State and must demonstrate verifiable achievements in promoting intra-ASEAN collaboration and tangible impacts that have been made on ASEAN. The nominee should also share plans to continue the awardee's work after winning the Prize.



"As long as their work generally benefits the people's lives in ASEAN, anybody or any organisation from any sector in the region could be nominated for the Prize. While the end-in-mind is to position the ASEAN Prize as a regional premium award to recognise and honour the best in the region, the intention is also to keep it as

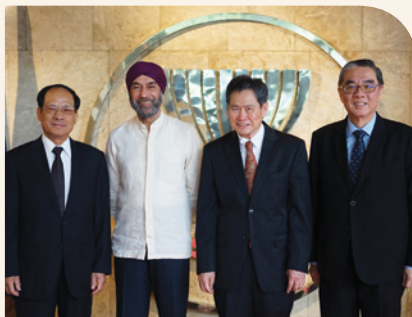
**Top**  
*Erlinda Uy Koe receives the first ASEAN Prize in 2018*

**Bottom**  
*Dr. Jemilah Mahmood receives the ASEAN Prize during the opening ceremony of the ASEAN Summit 2019*



**Top**

ASEAN Prize Judging Committee (left to right): former Sec-Gen Le Luong Minh, former Sec-Gen Ajit Singh, Sec-Gen of ASEAN Dato Lim Jock Hoi, and former Sec-Gen Ong Keng Yong

**Bottom**

ASEAN Studies Centre of the ISEAS—Yusof Ishak Institute received the ASEAN Prize 2020. The award will be officially presented to the ASEAN Studies Centre at the 54th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Brunei Darussalam



generic as possible, so that a person off the street can have that sense of regional belonging and vested interest (over this award),” Director Lee reiterated.

The Judging Committee, which consists of the current and past Secretaries-General of ASEAN, selects the ASEAN Prize recipient based on the quality of the nomination and the fulfilment of various assessment criteria. The recipient of the ASEAN Prize receives a trophy and a cash-prize of 20,000 US dollars, sponsored by Temasek Foundation, Singapore and Yayasan Hasanah of Malaysia, during the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting or at the year-end ASEAN Summit, subject to the arrangement of the ASEAN Chair Country that particular year.

“As Secretaries-General of ASEAN, past and present, the judges have a wide knowledge of the region, including evaluating how the advocacy work and activism engagement of the candidate can further contribute to the ASEAN Community building process and regional integration journey,” Director Lee added.

Since its establishment, the ASEAN Prize has been conferred to two individuals and one organisation.

In 2018, Madam Erlinda Uy Koe from the Philippines was the inaugural recipient of the ASEAN Prize. The conferment was based on her work and dedication to improve the lives of adults and children with autism, thereby

reflecting the inclusive spirit that is deeply rooted in an ASEAN Community. Madam Koe is presently the Chair Emeritus of Autism Society Philippines (ASP), and immediate Past Honourary Chair of the ASEAN Autism Network (AAN), a platform for ASEAN Member States to cooperate and unite in developing non-discriminatory programmes to support persons living with autism and their families. Her efforts have inspired autism awareness beyond the Philippines. The annual ASP flagship event, “Angels Walk for Autism,” for example, has already inspired other AAN members to hold their Autism Walks in their respective capitals.

In 2019, Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, a passionate community and humanitarian leader from Malaysia, was awarded the ASEAN Prize due to her lifelong and focused advocacy for emergency response needs of the vulnerable and marginalised communities. Dr. Jemilah, who founded the Malaysian Medical Relief Society (MERCY Malaysia), is also a founding member of the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network. With more than

two decades of experience managing diverse crises from health, disasters and conflicts, Dr. Jemilah contributed immensely to the establishment of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response Partnership Group. She donated her ASEAN Prize money equally to the Malaysian Red Crescent Society and the Surin Pitsuwan Foundation, a philanthropic organisation based in Thailand that focuses on education, diplomacy, and human security in ASEAN.

The ASEAN Prize 2020 was awarded to the Singapore-based ASEAN Studies Centre (ASC) of the ISEAS—Yusof Ishak Institute, making it the first organisation to win the award. Established in 2008, ASC conducts policy research and analysis on ASEAN’s development. It studies the regional political-security, economic and socio-cultural trends through its research programmes, publications, events, and institutional engagement. Such outreach activities have provided a regular platform for policymakers, scholars, public intellectuals, and business leaders to discuss and exchange constructive ideas that help shape the region’s development and foster a better understanding of ASEAN.

Director Lee expressed hope “that the ASEAN Prize would be a valuable mechanism in bringing ASEAN closer to its people.” He shared that the quality and calibre of the applications received get better annually. This, he believed, is a testimony that the ASEAN Prize is gradually gaining traction and awareness among the general ASEAN public. “Such positive development would lead to the nurturing of the ASEAN identity and the encouragement of people to contribute to the ASEAN Community building process,” he said. ■



**The call for nomination for ASEAN Prize 2021 is now open. Updates and information on ASEAN Prize are available at:**

<https://asean.org/asean-prize-1/>

# ASEAN Women IN SCIENCE



**KIRAN SAGOO, PHD**  
SENIOR OFFICER, ANALYSIS DIVISION  
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY  
DEPARTMENT



**NOVIA D. RULISTIA**  
STAFF WRITER  
*THE ASEAN*

**From the electricity that powers our computers to the Wi-Fi that enables us to stay connected, our daily lives are filled with technological inventions.**

Such inventions have been made possible through developments in the fields of science, engineering and mathematics. While these fields are often regarded as being male-dominated, women have made and continue to make valuable contributions.

For example, cancer research has benefited from two time Nobel Prize winner Marie Curie's pioneering research on radium and polonium. Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer A. Doudna, 2020 Nobel Prize winners in Chemistry, received recognition for their revolutionary gene-editing tool that allows scientists to rewrite DNA, which among others, will enable the development of new cancer therapies.

While women have made significant contributions to science, gender barriers continue to exclude women from participating fully in science. Increased participation of women in science will contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal target 9.5 that seeks to enhance scientific research and upgrade the industrial sector's technological capabilities. Thus, it is vital that girls are encouraged and supported in taking up science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses, and for women to be employed in these fields.







## SHARE OF FEMALE TERTIARY GRADUATES IN HEALTH AND WELFARE, 2013 OR CLOSEST YEAR (%)

**85.7%**  
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

**59.8%**  
LAO PDR

*\*2012  
Source: UNESCO Science  
Report: Towards 2030,  
2015, p 92*

**62.9%**  
MALAYSIA\*

**72.1%**  
PHILIPPINES

**42.3%**  
VIET NAM



**FEBRUARY 11  
IS INTERNATIONAL  
DAY OF WOMEN AND  
GIRLS IN SCIENCE**

### Science for Women

In Southeast Asia, women are performing comparatively well against their male counterparts in the STEM fields. The *UNESCO Science Report: Towards 2030* shows that women tertiary graduates in four ASEAN countries outnumber men in science. These fields include life sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, statistics, and computer sciences. Women are performing particularly well in health and welfare, which includes medicine, nursing, dental studies, medical technology, therapy, pharmacy, and social services. Women graduates are also on par with men in the agricultural field but lag in engineering.

Women researchers in the region are well represented in the natural sciences, engineering, medical, agricultural, and social sciences. In Myanmar, women researchers exceed men researchers by over 70 per cent in all five areas. Data also show that women researchers in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, and the Philippines exceed men in the medical field.

The participation of women in various scientific fields brings in much-needed diversity and allows for targeted research that addresses needs specific to women. In medical research, women's inclusion, both as researchers and participants in clinical trials, has resulted in better health outcomes for women. For example, researchers are now aware of disease symptoms that present themselves differently in women. Physicians are also able to tailor prescriptions more accurately for their female patients, thus reducing adverse side-effects.

While more women are pursuing careers in science, they are unfortunately not attaining leadership positions at the same pace as men. Prevalent barriers include unconscious bias in hiring and performance assessment, less access to research funding, gender pay gaps, and an institutional culture that penalises women for their roles as mothers and caretakers.

### ASEAN Recognises Innovation and Women Scientists

With the growing importance of the knowledge economy in fostering the region's economic and social growth, ASEAN is committed to increasing innovation in the region. The **ASEAN Declaration on Innovation** recognises the need to promote research and strengthen links between government, academia, industry, and society. ASEAN Leaders have also adopted the **ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work** that seeks to uphold inclusivity in education and employment for women, among others.

Initiatives are underway to increase the participation of girls and women in the region in the STEM field. Initiatives include recognising the contribution of ASEAN women to science. The **ASEAN-US Science Prize for Women** is awarded to women scientists who have worked to improve society in sustainable ways and serve as role models for other women in STEM careers.

*The ASEAN* talked to the winner, Dr. Yoke-Fun Chan, and honourable mention, Dr. Shefaly Shorey, about their work and what the recognition means for them.

Yoke-Fun Chan, an associate professor and the head of Department of Medical Microbiology at the University of Malaya, received the award for developing a vaccine and antivirals for enterovirus A71— a virus that usually causes mild hand, foot and mouth disease, and sometimes brain infection, in children. She also works with computer scientists and psychologists to develop education tools to raise awareness on how to prevent the disease

"Infections occur in kindergartens and what is actually needed is good hygiene and frequent hand washing," said Chan. She is also researching ways to predict hand, foot and mouth disease and effective ways to prevent it.

Chan shares that her interest in science was fueled during her undergraduate days, when she participated in a final year

**The COVID-19 pandemic posed additional challenges to women and girls, which may have long-term consequences in their participation in science. Women make up the majority of front liners in the battle against the pandemic. Their roles as nurses, technicians and caregivers place them at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 compared with their male counterparts. Women are also putting in very long hours and face a higher burnt-out rate, as they manage both work and household duties.**

**The closure of schools raises the risks of female students falling behind or dropping out of their current education. Gender preferences have resulted in boys being given more time on the one home computer that has become essential for online learning. Many girls are also at risk of never returning to schools when they reopen due to their roles as caregivers in their families or income providers.**

research project on thalassemia, an inherited blood disorder that causes anemia. She said, "I enjoyed the challenge of developing research questions and determining whether the methods used were effective in providing answers. I found science fun and interesting and wanted to explore more."

Chan has been working for over 20 years on enterovirus A71 and is well-versed in the challenges faced by the research community, and in particular women. The current research landscape is defined by short-term grants of two years, which makes it difficult for long-term sustainability. Science is also seen as not being lucrative enough. Nevertheless, this limitation has been a push factor for researchers to apply for international grants, which are often for three to five years.

Other challenges include debunking prevalent gender stereotypes.



**“It will be beneficial if ASEAN countries could develop further collaboration for combating infectious diseases in the region.”**

“Employers need to understand that women put in 100 per cent at work, and also 100 per cent at home. They don’t scale back,” said Chan. Chan also shares that as women wear many hats, it would be helpful to have a supportive system in place, both at home and at work.

Chan shares that winning the ASEAN-US Science Prize has provided her with the opportunity to make science visible. It has also enabled her to encourage others, especially young women, to enter the field. She hopes for there to be more opportunities for young scientists,

*Dr. Yoke-Fun Chan*

to enable them to grow as researchers and contribute to the region. “It will be beneficial if ASEAN countries could develop further collaboration for combating infectious diseases in the region,” she added.

Shefaly Shorey, an assistant professor at the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, National University of Singapore, made a mid-career switch at the age of



**“It is also never too late to make a career change. Learning is life-long, and the oldest person to join the recent degree in Nursing Studies cohort is 55 years old.”**



*Dr. Shefaly Shorey*

28 to pursue her passion. A sequence of events that began with witnessing first-hand the impact nurses had on a family member’s quality of life, to seeing an advertisement calling for a mid-career switch into nursing, led her to step away from a master’s level position. Shorey opted for a position that needed only a diploma at that time. From doing nursing rounds at the hospital, she rode the wave of growth in the field, and soon became the first PhD graduate from Alice Lee School of Nursing Studies.

Shorey received the honourable mention for her research in addressing depression in pregnancy and motherhood. Based on her findings, she designs psychosocial and educational interventions for mothers. Her programmes have expanded to include fathers and grandparents. She has developed a free educational application called “Home but Not Alone” to support new parents manage stress and deter post-natal depression.

She shares that the stigma attached to depression keeps it hidden. “Mothers who are going through depression face a tough time as she can’t share with people that she is feeling down. She feels guilty herself and no one is available to reassure her that it is ok to feel that way,” said Shorey. Through her programmes, Shorey is able to reach out to mothers and provide them with much needed information.

Among the challenges Shorey faces are the lack of understanding on what PhD nurses do. She stresses the need to talk to people so that they can better understand the field.

By translating her research into accessible formats, such as videos, she is able to reach out to a wide audience and share her work. Due to the pandemic, she moved online and now runs weekly online sessions on the Facebook page – Family for Life. “This has been life-streamed to over 25,000 parents. I enjoy doing this

as it allows me to translate my research into practice and improve people’s lives,” she said.

“My videos are evidence-based and have been tested in Singapore,” said Shorey. “They are culturally appropriate and appear on the Singapore Ministry of Family and Social Development webpage. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. I would love for this to be translated and used in other ASEAN countries.”

Both Chan and Shorey agree following one’s passion is key to building a career in science. “It is also never too late to make a career change. Learning is life-long, and the oldest person to join the recent degree in Nursing Studies cohort is 55 years old,” shared Shorey.

They both also agree that communication is key in addressing challenges in the field. Chan highlights that it is imperative to teach young boys and girls that equality is crucial. “Young men must be taught to respect women,” said Chan. Shorey notes that there are now 12 to 15 men joining each nursing studies cohort. It is a slow shift away from gender stereotypes, but an encouraging one. ■



**The ASEAN-US Science Prize for Women is organised by ASEAN through the ASEAN Committee**

**on Science, Technology, and Innovation (COSTI), the U.S. Government through USAID and Underwriters Laboratories, a non-profit organization, to recognise promising, early- to mid-career female scientists for their academic and professional achievements. The competition will continue in 2021 with the theme “Clear Air and Clean Water.”**



**Detailed information on the competition can be found at:**  
<http://scienceprize4women.asean.org>





## SOUTHEAST ASIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

# WORLD'S OLDEST KNOWN FIGURATIVE ART FOUND IN SULAWESI, INDONESIA



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**For decades, prehistoric figurative cave art was thought to have first appeared and flourished in Europe in the late Pleistocene period (Great Ice Age).**

But the discovery of animal paintings and handprints in Leang Tedongnge, an isolated limestone cave in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, is upending this long-held view. The animal painting that adorns its rear wall dates back to at least 45,500 years ago—more than 10,000 years older than the earliest figurative cave paintings found in Europe.

A field research team from Australia's Griffith University and Indonesia's National Research Centre for Archaeological (ARKENAS) discovered the Leang Tedongnge cave art in November 2017. The team was led by archaeologists Maxime Aubert and Adam Brumm and included Indonesian researchers Basran Burhan and Adhi Agus Oktaviana, both

PhD students at Griffith University. The field discovery resulted from the team's archaeological exploration of South Sulawesi's Maros-Pangkep karst region, an area made up of limestone cliffs and caves.

### The Leang Tedongnge Cave Art

Leang Tedongnge is located in a relatively untouched part of the karst terrain, a two-hour walk from the closest village. Burhan said that when the team explored the cave, they spotted the life-sized pig paintings easily with some light. "It (mural) was located 40-50 meters from the cave entrance, two meters from the ground," Burhan told *The ASEAN*.

The ancient mural includes paintings of three Sulawesi warty pigs with two handprints stenciled above a pig's rump. One pig image was still very well preserved, while the other two were only partially visible due to the cave wall's exfoliation.

Oktaviana said that the cave "artists" used red ochre, a natural clay pigment, to paint the animals. The paint strokes also suggest that they likely used their fingertips for painting.





*Cave wall painting at Leang Tedongnge, Maros-Pangkep Karst Region, South Sulawesi*

The hand stencils may have been created by placing their hands against the wall and spitting ochre onto them directly or blowing the pigment through a long bone, Oktaviana added. He mentioned that the team found a long bone in another cave in the same region, Leang Bulu Bettue.

To determine the cave art's age, the team extracted portions of the calcite (the same mineral that creates stalactites and stalagmites) that had formed on top of one pig painting and analysed the sample for levels of uranium, a technique known as uranium-series dating. Since the pig painting preceded the formation of the calcite layer, it is inferred to be at least as old as or even older than the calcite which was 45,500 years old.

A detailed discussion of the images, materials, and dating method was published in *Science Advances* (January 2021).

### **Cave Art Around the Maros-Pangkep Region**

The Leang Tedongnge pig painting may be the oldest, but it is not the sole artwork discovered in the Maros-Pangkep region.

The same Australian and Indonesian research team found another set of figurative paintings in the Leang Bulu' Sipong 4 cave at about the same time as the Leang Tedongnge cave art. The Leang Bulu' Sipong 4 cave paintings portray part-human, part-animal figures hunting large mammals. They were created at least 44,000 years ago, making them the second oldest known examples of cave art.

In 2018, the team discovered another Sulawesi warty pig painting in Leang Balangajia 1 cave. The painting was dated at least 32,000 years ago.

Oktaviana said the survey teams had found many spectacular rock arts in hundreds of caves in Maros-Pangkep, but most have yet to be fully explored and dated.

### **Meaning and Significance of the Maros-Pangkep Rock Art Images**

Sulawesi's native animals are the frequent themes of the artwork found in Maros-Pangkep's caves.

"Anoa (dwarf buffalo), warty pig, and babirusa (deer-pig) are native species of Sulawesi, and their pictures are found on

cave walls in Maros-Pangkep. The bones of those animals are also found in almost every cave as earlier humans may have hunted them for food," Burhan said.

Oktaviana, who has studied rock art in Papua, Sumatra, and Borneo, said that Sulawesi's cave paintings were unique as they featured a combination of tropical forest animals and marine animals. He said that this might be attributed to Sulawesi's strategic location, which is smack in the middle of Wallacea, a vast zone of oceanic islands located between the Asia and Australia continents.

Since the team has yet to find evidence of the anatomically modern humans (i.e. *homo sapiens*) that dwelt in the area and made the animal paintings, Burhan said it is difficult to fully explain the meaning and purpose behind the warty pig paintings. He said that one theory that emerged from earlier studies of cave art was that animal images may have symbolised the value placed by the early dwellers on their major food source and their hope for a bountiful supply.

The hunting scene from the Leang Bulu' Sipong 4 cave was also speculated to be the first ever evidence of early modern humans' belief in mythical creatures and attempt at visual storytelling.

Meanwhile, the hand stencils, which are also a universal feature of cave art around the world, may have symbolised early humans' appeal for "spiritual" protection, Oktaviana said.

While the cave art discoveries in Maros-Pangkep still leave many questions unanswered, they clearly signify that the early modern humans that lived in the area had evolved cognitively and were capable of abstract thinking as well as symbolic and creative expression.





*Leang Tedongnge cave mouth*

### Preserving Cave Art

Preserving the ancient cave murals is a daunting but necessary task, not only to protect humankind's prehistoric heritage but also to facilitate further research.

Natural elements and human activities, Burhan said, have impacted the condition of the paintings that adorn the cave walls. He said that some of the cave paintings found in sites within the Maros-Pangkep area show signs of exfoliation, likely due to foot traffic.

Burhan noted that the Cultural Heritage Preservation Agency (BPCB) in South Sulawesi has taken steps to protect the South Sulawesi sites, such as by establishing a programme to monitor these sites. "They (authorities) meet three times a year. They measure the moisture, wind, carbon dioxide, and other variables to know exactly their impact on rock art. They are also observing if mining activities have an effect," Burhan said.

For its part, the archaeological team has photographed the prehistoric murals and will do so every year to document the changes to the wall images over time, Oktaviana said. Burhan mentioned that the BPCB also produced a 3D model of Leang Tedongnge in 2020.

### The Future of Cave Art Research

The recent archaeological breakthroughs and thriving research environment in the Sulawesi region have inspired Indonesian archaeological students to specialise in cave art, said Oktaviana. He noted that many students have been given the opportunity to work on the team's archaeological projects.

"In the Maros-Pangkep research sites, university students join in the excavation and survey of new sites," said Oktaviana. He added that in the case of Leang Balangajia, in which more than 100 images were found, the students were specifically tapped to help in the photo documentation. He said that the hands-on experience is important in the training of the next generation of Indonesian archaeologists.

As for Burhan and Oktaviana, both are looking forward to expanding the scope of their archaeological research.

"We know that modern humans reached Sunda (mainland Southeast Asia) and Sahul (Australia-Papua continent) about 60,000 to 70,000 years ago; but in Sulawesi, the oldest sites are only about 45,000," said Burhan. In the future, he said, he would like to discover older evidence of life in the area and to learn more about the cave "artists."

Oktaviana, meanwhile, said he would like to examine the caves in Eastern Indonesia for the presence of similar paintings and compare them with those in Sulawesi.

The Maros-Pangkep cave art discoveries are likely not the last archaeological surprise to come out of Indonesia, in general, and Sulawesi, in particular. Southeast Asia has become an important region not only in terms of mapping the epic journey of modern human ancestors but also in unravelling their stories and the path they took to becoming modern humans. ■



**Basran Burhan is the Director of Lima Institute Makassar, Indonesia and a researcher at the Archaeological**

**Research Center for Society, Hasanuddin University. He has an undergraduate degree in archaeology and is currently pursuing his PhD degree at Griffith University, Australia. His research interests lie in sedimentology and site formation processes.**

**Adhi Agus Oktaviana is a researcher at Indonesia's National Research Centre for Archaeological (ARKENAS) specialising in prehistoric archaeology. He has conducted research in many parts of Indonesia, including in South Sumatra, North and Southeast Maluku, and Raja Ampat. He pursued his undergraduate degree at the University of Indonesia and is currently taking a PhD at Griffith University, Australia.**



**For further reading, please visit:**

<https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/7/3/eabd4648>





*Buu Long Pagoda,  
Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam*

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